

ISSUE 100

# WORLD OF WARCRAFT

## WRATH of the LICH KING

**MASSIVE REVIEWS**

**UNIVERSE AT WAR**  
Alien visitors cause RTS mayhem

**SOLDIER OF FORTUNE: PAYBACK**  
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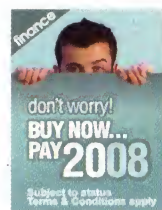
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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

# PCZONE

COVER STORY

## 60 WRATH OF THE LICH KING

Northrend exposure – we take a look at the new lands and lore of *World of Warcraft*

NEVERQUEST 123

"I work my body like a gladiator, slaughtering snails"



THE ORANGE BOX 41  
THE MAKING OF VALVE'S TANGERINE PHENOMENON

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



60 WRATH OF THE LICH KING  
41 MAKING OF THE ORANGE BOX  
54 DEAD SPACE

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 53 words... Don't blame us, blame the industry – it's the worst reviews issue for many a moon. But don't be disheartened – there's excellent stuff in the past and future for us to look at. Why don't those stupid publisher morons realise that if just one of them released a decent game now, it'd clean up?



## WHO? ME?

WHEN I WAS 15 years old I bought a copy of *PC ZONE* with *BioForge* on the front, attracted by the big green handprint on the cover and a magazine logo that only the horrors of the mid-90s could ever have produced. At this point I unwittingly set up a chain reaction that would result in me, 12 years later, becoming its editor. Who saw that coming? I didn't. I guess an unhealthy obsession with Charlie Brooker, a love for the various decrepit and crash-hungry PCs I've owned along the way and 'being a good boy really' have led me inexorably to this almighty pedestal in gaming. And it's an honour, an absolute bloody honour. I've loved this mag for years, and I'm glad to be able to give something back.

That doesn't stop me being absolutely terrified about breaking everything. I barely slept last night. I mean, most people I know wouldn't trust me holding a dog on a piece of string while they went into Budgens – the fact that I now edit a national publication is a sure sign of some fault in the system. I've only just accepted that it's real. Anyway (aside from the forced re-institution of the tradition of hot beverage retrieval by lowly staff members for the editor) the plan is to make this mag sing, dance, inform and entertain with a greater punch than ever before. Assuming I don't completely bollocks it all up.

Will Porter

Will Porter, editor

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We make sure

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# BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAY CONTENT

FEATURE

## 26 BEST AND WORST CHARACTERS

Which PC gaming characters have we grown to love... and which do we hate?

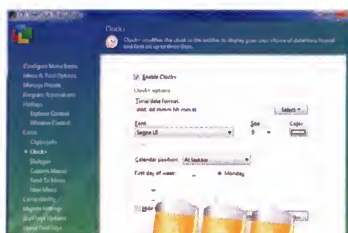
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32 UPFRONT  
Alone In  
The Dark



GET INVOLVED! 118

ONLINE ZONE  
FIGHT CLUB!  
PUBCASTS!  
ZONE CHAT!  
BLOGS!

**FREEPLAY/FREWARE**

**Freeware**  
Steve Hogarty works hard for the money, so treat him right

**FLYWRENCH**  
Adjust flags for fun

**SPHERES OF CHAOS**  
Spheres of chaos

**GARDEN GNOME CARNAGE**  
Gnomes: now officially cool

**WEBGAME OF THE MONTH**  
LAUNCHBALL

108 **FREWARE**  
If free games were chandeliers, Steve Hogarty would have played over seven chandeliers this month

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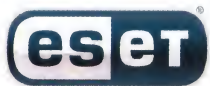
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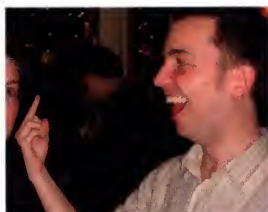
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# MEET THE TEAM

The Editor is dead! Long live the Editor!



## WILL PORTER

Editor

AGE: 27

LIKES: Farmers

DISLIKES: Trespassers

FANCIES: Powerful women

FAVE GAME: *Fallout*

PLAYING NOW: *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (again)

After being forced to make tea, get pissed for a legendary drinking feature, and drunkenly handle loaded Beretta pistols owned by dodgy East European publishers, Will "he's a good boy, really" Porter is finally PC ZONE's boss man. Will has begun informing his shell-shocked team about his exciting vision for the magazine through a Charlie's Angels-style speaker phone, while relaxing on Future's executive tropical island. So, look forward to more arbitrary references to QPR, in-depth analysis of *Fallout*, and monthly interviews with Steve 'Sam & Max' Purcell.



## ED ZITRON

DVD Put-together-er

From the French "Zut Alors!", Zitron is your Lord of the Disc – a bit like Michael Flatley, but with more *Windows* utilities and *Half-Life* mods. It's a little-known fact that Ed's brain is actually heavier than the rest of his body.

NOW PLAYING: *EverQuest II*



## STEVE HOGARTY

Editor of a Section

Steve has been walking backwards for Christmas, across the Irish Sea. He's also been spending his £500 winnings of a recent *Guitar Hero* competition on leprechauns, Guinness, 30 trees, and the abolition of Irish stereotypes.

NOW PLAYING: *Guitar Hero III*

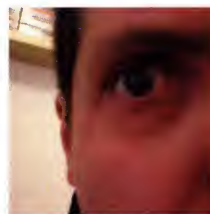


## RICHARD COSGROVE

Word Fascist

Our dedicated production editor spends every working hour finding lazy screenshot captions to ban. Currently "A tank yesterday," and "Burn, burn, burn, a ring of fire," have been sent to the great games journo cliché graveyard. For now.

NOW PLAYING: *STALKER*

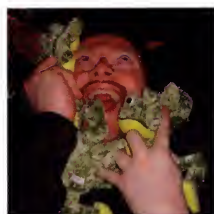


## JAMIE SEFTON

Editor at large

Far from actually being dead, Sefton is now desperately wandering the streets of Leeds asking startled strangers if they knew that he was once an important magazine figure who once urinated in the Playboy Mansion pool.

NOW PLAYING: *Crysis*

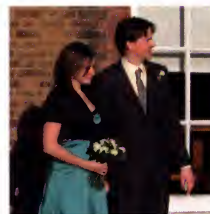


## LOG

Party Animal

Log had quite an eventful Future Christmas party, terrifying other revellers on the dodgems, and vomiting in a plastic bag on the bus from the venue because someone from another magazine had a loud, annoying voice.

NOW PLAYING: *NOLF2*



## PHIL WAND

Cyborg Relations

As well as conversing in a variety of Baud rates, Wandy has a love of trance artiste Ulrich Schnauss. And he's lucky that his new wife shares his passion for silicon chips and maintaining *Team Fortress 2* servers.

NOW PLAYING: *TF2*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... Free booze and food at numerous Xmas/New Year bashes, new games PCs for all  
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... German DVD printers, errant copies of *Auto Assault*, pints of Bailey's

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

WHO THE HELL MADE WILL EDITOR? **145 mins** More to the point, who were the rejects?

LAPTOP STALKER **13 mins** Playing *STALKER* using a trackpad does not make for an entertaining time

TIBERIUM **5 mins** The screenshots could have been a bit more 'C&C-ey', but we have hope!

THE INAUGURAL PC ZONE FANCY DRESS PUB CRAWL **34 mins** If you have an attractive girlfriend who'll dress up as Alyx, can we borrow her?

JINGLE ALL THE WAY **11 mins** Is Arrie actually a comic genius? Martin Korda still raves about *Kindergarten Cop*...

THE PC ZONE HOODIE **25 mins** Possibly the greatest piece of clothing since the invention of the balaclava

WOW SPECTRAL TIGERS ON EBAY **20 mins** They go for £400? That'll teach us for being generous with our forum compo...

NEW PC PAIN **7 mins** Discovering after the shops close that your monitor cable needs a stupid adaptor

LOG BEING SICK ON THE PARTY BUS **30 mins** Because an annoying man kept talking about how Led Zeppelin saved his life

LOG CLAIMING HE WET HIMSELF EARLIER THAT NIGHT **47 mins** Forensic studies suggest he might have drunkenly spilt water

## WIN!

Dear, Tiny Compo. Thou art smaller than a pixel on a tiny LCD display, yet you cause no end of pleasure and grief. Pleasure for the lucky soul who answers your hidden question correctly, and grief for those who lack the razor-sharp eagle eyes that are needed to spot your existence. Oh Tiny Compo you are a harsh mistress. Last month's winner was Amma Lydon in Dudley. Send this month's answers to "I don't believe that Mulder won an award for acting!", PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date – 27 Feb 2008 – will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition.



# LETTERS



The editor's responsibility gets deputised to the barely literate *Jon Blyth*

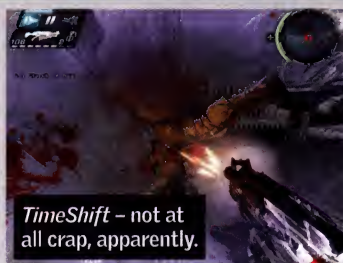


## KING OF LETTERS

### BARGAIN HUNTER

Although this will be published late enough to seem irrelevant, I thought I'd share my wisdom/idiocy with the gaming community. What gets my vote for best of 2007? *BioShock*? Nope. *Crysis*? Nada. *Portal*? (Looks tentatively over shoulder.) Not even played it. The game that gets my vote is... *TimeShift*. Now before everyone attacks my face with the corners of their sharpened keyboards, let me explain. *TimeShift* should have been shit, as in screen-smashingly terrible. Yet because of Vivendi's nurturing, it was actually rather good. Sure, *BioShock* was better in terms of... well... pretty much everything. But *BioShock* was always going to be great.

Despite a few spikes of corporate bastardry (need I refer to the letters H and M?) 2007 has shown that developers and publishers care about the games they make, with *STALKER* returning from its radioactive grave, and



*TimeShift* – not at all crap, apparently.

*The Witcher* being the best RPG of the year. *TimeShift*, with its landmark development U-turn, sums this up better than any other game, and will hopefully be an example to all the rushed developments, movie-tie-ins, and get-rich-quick schemes of 2008. Because of *TimeShift*, there are no longer any excuses for crap games.

*Richard Lane*

**I'm no businessman – I'd rather take a bath with toasters than aspire to that grubby goal – but I do feel that making a game that people will buy seems an effective way to make cash. I can't even pretend to know why**

## WIN!



Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're all modern-like, fingers to keyboard. Every month, we'll reward our chosen royalty with a posh XFX GeForce 8600GT PCI-E graphics card. For more info, check out [www.xfxforce.com](http://www.xfxforce.com). You can also buy one at [www.dabs.com](http://www.dabs.com) for £75 (product code PV-T84J-UDF3).

some companies publish unfinished games. I notice, however, that all the games you mention are new titles, unsupported by movie tie-ins or a strong brand. Perhaps that's the trick: making an original game forces you to make it good.



*Crysis*: worth the score?

### CRYTICKING OFF

I'm a nice chap really but this email makes me sound like a nasty person, but anyway, this is something I don't think I will be alone in thinking... so here you go.

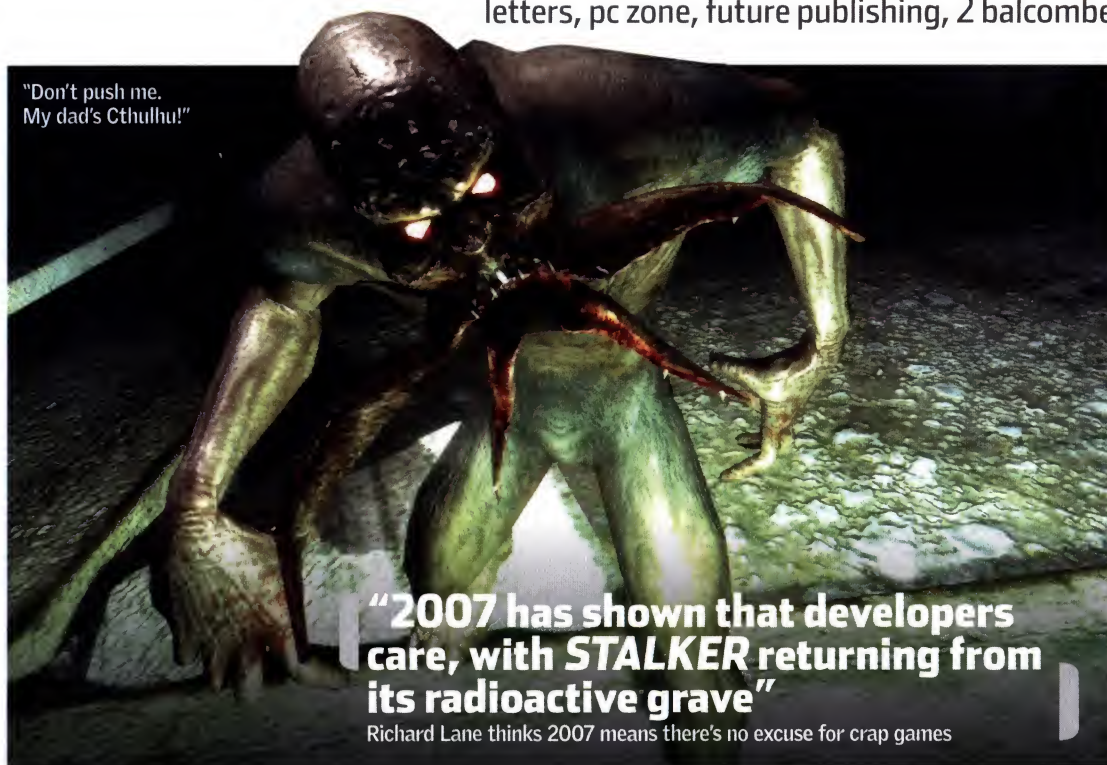
It's time for *PC ZONE* to come clean. I can't, for one minute, understand your rating of *Crysis*. While I applaud your very well written review, I don't understand where 92% came from. With very negative statements like '*Crysis* ends on an outright kick in the teeth,' 'it's quite fun' and 'Enemy AI is either very good or absolutely pig stupid', where you made very clear that the first half is more fun than the second half, and where I've roughly calculated that

about a quarter of your review consisted of negative comments, where in the world did you get 92% from?

Is *PC ZONE* contracted by game publishers to give high percentages for exclusive cover reviews? How can a magazine claim an 'Exclusive Review' without a deal being made with the publisher? Is *PCZ* really unbiased in it's core objective, as a serious reviewer of a multimillion pound industry? Or is it that money makes the world go round and I should become more accepting of realistic practices? Am I too close to the truth? Will this email ever be published? Go on I dare you.

*Eddie*





"Don't push me.  
My dad's Cthulhu!"

## "2007 has shown that developers care, with *STALKER* returning from its radioactive grave"

Richard Lane thinks 2007 means there's no excuse for crap games

Will says: "Challenge accepted. The 92% came from me really, really, really enjoying the game. It does stuff that I've never been able to do in a game before, and it's easily the most fun I've had in a shooter in donkey's years. I'd say that freedom and that replayability makes it worth the money – and a better, more original and more important game than COD4 (or whatever). What's more, it's easily one of the best games of 2007. I hoped that I got that across in the review – but perhaps I didn't."

"If *Crysis* were a film with a crap ending then I think you'd be right, but I just feel that games are different. My complaints were the difference between a 92% and a 95% – not the difference between an '80s and a '90s score."

"As for the bias charges, I won't say that it isn't an issue that affects our industry (or any entertainment industry) but it's something I feel very strongly about, and something that I intend to ensure never darkens *PC ZONE*'s door."

### HELLO, SHUT UP

Firstly I'd like to say thanks *PC ZONE*. That was sarcasm. Anyway, I spent hours looking through a box of old CDs containing games like *Operation Flashpoint*, *SiN*, *SWAT*, *SWAT 2* and other not-so-great classics, but it was

largely comprised of old *PC ZONE* CDs. All this and I was trying to find the greatest game of all time, *Constructor* by Acclaim: it took me hours! Only for me to later realise it was on my desk the whole time for safe keeping. The anger, oh the anger.

Nathan Shepherd

Do you like us or hate us? It's hard to tell. On the one hand, you seem to despise us, but you don't seem to be able to give us up. You need us, you

resent us. We're a drugpowder, Nathan, we're dancing in your tear ducts. Dare I suggest a month off to sort yourself out?

### INSTALLATION MOVIES

I must take issue with Mr Terrazzano's letter about pointless intros. The whole point of the intro is to get you hyped up for the game and to give newbies to the genre a little insight into what the game is about. Where would *C&C* be without intros? Did *C&C3* "feel" like proper *C&C* without an install intro? No it did not, in my humble opinion.



### ASK THE TXTPERTS

Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Just want somewhere to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply text the *PC ZONE* 'Txtperts' (see what we did there?) and we'll answer you right here...

My PC has an ATI RADEON XPRESS 200 graphic card but I don't know what to upgrade it to at a small budget of £80.

mealolcat

The 8800GT is a little outside your price range at £140, but consider the 8600GT – it'll do you for the immediate future and costs under £80.

How about starting 2008 correctly...  
*Quake III Arena* mods would do for a start!

Jonesy

We've been looking over the oldies with the game's rerelease on Steam, so this is a near-cert for next month.

How about a tiny picture of *Spore* to make up for all the delays!

Sim Sala Bim

OK. Look to your right and up a bit.



### SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

#### GUITAR HERO III

Sent in by James Warhead

**PC ZONE score: 70%**

In response to Hogarty's disparaging review of *Guitar Hero*, I'd like to defend the PC as the perfect platform for rock rhythm gaming and wiggling out all up on your frets – in certain circumstances. First, you have to have bought one of those posture-correcting chairs in the '80s, which consist of two cushioned areas at right angles; you kneel on the lower, and sit your derriere on the other. Now, if you were to paint this chair green, and film yourself rocking out, then digitally remove the chair in *After Effects*, I would look pretty much exactly like any rock star who had dropped to his knees during an over-indulgent solo, in the throes of satanic axe worship. All the while, maintaining an excellent posture and avoiding back problems in later life. Take that, you stupid standy-uppy console owners!

**Your shout: 85%**



Paint that rug green  
and off you go.

Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words, your name and a percentage score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

By texting *PC ZONE* you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate.



Like Will pointed out a few months ago – clever install routines are gone now, all replaced with plain old *InstallShield*. Rant over – keep up the good mag, and who are you going to get to replace Suze?

Dave Christofferson

I have no strong opinion on this, and would feel like a fraud if I tried to synthesise one. However, I can answer your question about Suzy, with the alphabetically-challenged Ed Zitron. He's less pleasing on the eye, but he's a nice bloke and knows a lot about *WOW* so stop complaining.

## PIXEL SHADY

I feel the need to vent my frustration at Pixel Shader 3.0 games. Yes I know my rig is old (Athlon XP 2600, 2GB RAM, Sound Blaster Audigy and a X800 GTO AGP video card) but where I struggle with games like *BioShock* and *COD4* (using Shader patches) I can play *HL2* almost maxed out and *Kane & Lynch* and *Gears of War* with reasonable results.

I like games at the cutting edge of technology, but is it really too much trouble to make them playable on older systems. We can't all afford to custom build or buy a new PC every 18 months. Developers are alienating a large section of the market by not looking back anymore. Oh, well. Back to the antlions.

Mark

The fact that Pixel Shader 3.0 games get hacked to work perfectly well with 2.0 cards is proof enough for my conspiracy-addled brain that it's just a meaningless numbers/pissing contest designed only to drive hardware sales. Like DirectX 10 – which incidentally, you'll need for Pixel Shader 4.0. Perhaps if they start increasing the numbers by 2, they could get away with even less



Gaming cliché #203: Cigar-chomping officer with a caterpillar under his nose.

of a tangible technical benefit. Imagine how prehistoric we'd feel if Pixel Shader 7 came out NOW!

## I BLAME THE PARENTS

I feel I have to write and ask why British parents can't seem to grasp the most basic elements of a system that has been in operation for some 12 years. We constantly read stories that our children are having their lives destroyed by games that are far too mature for them, and that children should not be allowed to buy them.

I agree that giving a 12 year-old access to *Unreal Tournament III* is a bad idea, but so does the BBFC – they've been rating video games since 1984! I bought *UT3* the other day and you really can't fail to miss the big round 18 logo on the front. And the European game industry

has also bent over backwards to offer an understandable and measured rating system – PEGI – but these games are still bought for children by their parents, who only become outraged that their angel is allowed to play such games – which he isn't – when they watch him scoring consecutive headshots.

This makes me wonder what'll happen if the game industry is forced to conform to the hapless hordes of parents, who can't use common sense and not buy an 18-rated game for their 10 year-old. Instead, we have to have our choices made for us, and have all violence and anger removed from games, because we're not equipped to deal with it.

Richard Rose

The problem with your approach Richard, is that it takes reality into account and isn't scandalous. Simply stating the palatable facts has never caused a *Daily Mail* reader to drop her handbag and write a lavender-scented letter to her local MP, and giving responsibility to parents will never work, because that means they can't blame anyone when their wretched womb-turd stabs a horse.

The BBFC is also attached to reality, as it has a new website – Parents BBFC ([www.pbbfc.co.uk](http://www.pbbfc.co.uk)) – that explains why a videogame is given its certificate in terms so simple, even the most automatically outraged, foot-stamping moralistic moron might understand them. This won't stop the unending demands to ban this filth, but it lets us know we're right. PCZ

## WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?

### GUITAR HERO III

[www.guitarhero.com](http://www.guitarhero.com)

Look, we know it's not ideal, but we'll be damned if we're going to let the Xbox magazines have all the fun.

### VIVA PIÑATA

[www.vivapinata.com](http://www.vivapinata.com)

Well, this one works a lot better than on the 360 actually, so stick that in your fancy new HDMI cables.

### THE ART OF THEFT

[snipurl.com/theartofthft](http://snipurl.com/theartofthft)

Amusingly good freeware from the vitriolic voice of the internet.

## WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

### THIS MONTH: MARKY MALARKEY



### CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN COMBAT

Single player much the same, but the multiplayer is where it's at. I do like modern mayhem with custom weapons.

### COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FORCES

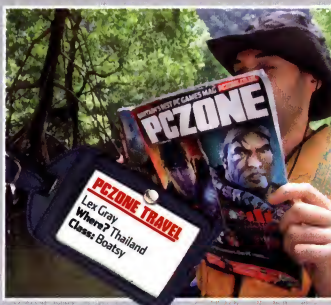
Nowt better than some kraut kicking. Great RTS fun and loads of replay value. Something to test that tactical noggin of mine.

### THE ORANGE BOX

Episode Two, *Team Fortress 2*, and of course... *PORTAL*! THE best bargain of the year. A game for story, a game for fun and a game for uniqueness.

What to do with the up your nose...  
...the...  
...the...  
...the...

## PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!





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**COVER STORY**

# **WORLD OF WARCRAFT WRATH OF THE LICH KING**

The time of his arrival comes near, so let us help you prepare.  
For in the final hour, all must serve the one... true... king





**B**lizzard, a company whose very name shows that they're no stranger to themes of snow and ice, are soon to unleash a legendary MMO continent on their nine million subscribers. Their very own land of the midnight sun: Northrend. Last seen in *Warcraft III* expansion *The Frozen Throne*, it's an area steeped in lore and much loved by hordes of Blizzard fans worldwide. So excited are the *WOW* players in the PCZ team (all of us) that we decided to compile a mammoth guide to everything Northrend can offer, and to pester Blizzard for as much new information as we could forcibly extract. And so, without much further ado, let's go hunt us some walrus people... It's a big day in the North...

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PCZONE

## UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

## Imagination

**I** MAGINATION IS THE best. There's no need to go to the cinema when you've got the best cinema right there inside your brain: the imagination cinema. And who needs games when you've got imagination? I'm playing *Unreal Tournament 2050* in my imagination right now, and it's really good. Oh, ding, I've just levelled up in *WOW3* – that's right, I can play two games at once in my imagination.

But you can do other things with imagination too. Filthy things. Terribly filthy things. And you can do them in public. You could be in a shop, standing next to a row of chicken breast fillets, and in your imagination you could be imagining that they're ladies' boobs. Nobody would even know you were imagining that, and even if they did know, they couldn't stop you. They could throw you in prison but you'd still be imagining.

An American columnist called Kevin McCullough did this with his imagination: he imagined that *Mass Effect* – a Xbox 360 game from BioWare – is not a semi-free-roaming sci-fi RPG in which you save the galaxy from annihilation, but a game in which "persons hump in every form, format, multiple, gender-oriented possibility they can think of."

Why would somebody imagine such depravity? It's sickening. That's why I believe that imagination should be censored and regulated, to prevent idiots imagining whatever they want and then forming opinions and going on TV with them as if they were fact.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor



## THE SECRET WORLD

Funcom's chilling MMO revealed [www.darkdaysarecoming.com](http://www.darkdaysarecoming.com) | ETA: TBC

**H**AVING PLANNED ON remaining silent after their initial announcement, Funcom generously gave in to our pestering ways and decided to spill a bean or two on their as yet undercover project, *The Secret World*. Product Manager Erling Ellingson takes the floor...

**Q** What kind of MMO is *The Secret World* – heavily combat-based, quest-based, more social-based...?

**A** I think you'll find a nice mix of all of these aspects, but there will definitely be a lot of exciting combat and exploration. You'll find fighting classes that are not at all standard for massive online games, such as the martial artist. As with *Age of Conan*, we're also putting a lot of effort into making huge, believable environments. And hey, you know how much emphasis Funcom puts on the social element in our games! And, of course, we're known for our strong storytelling abilities, and we will make

sure that *The Secret World* enjoys our tradition of making games heavy on story.

**Tell us a little about the game's story...**

There are a thousand stories to this game. A world of stories! The setting for *The Secret World* is actually our own world, close to our present time. But there is something out there, another world beyond our own. I like to think of it as opening a door in your apartment, and if you really want it, you will step into this world that no one really knows much about. In this world there are mysteries, there are monsters and there are some very, very dark conspiracies. There are also many myths and legends from our own world, that may play a part in all of this.

**When and where is the game based?**

It's set in our own world and you will actually be exploring vast cities such as London and New York. This creates some really exciting opportunities for us as a developer, to actually set a massive online game in real-world cities. As I said, the

game takes place in what is close to our own, present time, but will be battling creatures of darkness across the world and throughout time!

**What's going to differentiate *The Secret World* from other MMOs?**

At this stage in the game, I would say the setting. It's just something really new and exciting, light years away from elves and trolls. Now, I didn't say we won't have elves and trolls in the game (and I'm not saying we are either!), but if we do, you might actually get to see them stomping about in Times Square! Or not. If I got paid for every ambiguity in this interview I'd be a rich man.

**What games is *The Secret World* comparative to?**

I would say that *The Secret World* is really a mish-mash of different games all in one, from *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* to *Anarchy Online*. Perhaps a little bit of *Grand Theft Auto* thrown in for good measure? As with all Funcom products, what we really want to do is just make something different. We created the first sci-fi MMO, and now we're creating the first contemporary MMO.

**Will play be instanced or streamed?**

We're not ready to go into too many details here, but I can promise you that we have some huge environments in the game. The engine we're using is the same as the one we're using for *Age of Conan* (though we are always improving upon it, and *The Secret World* will launch much later than *Age of Conan* so expect to see a lot of improvements), and that engine is by now renowned for the massive landscapes that we are able to render – from massive mountain-ranges to vast cities.



STOP PRESS!

## DEATHSPANK

Hothead Games have signed Ron Gilbert as their new Creative Director, to work on *DeathSpank* – described as "Monkey Island meets Diablo".

## DEMIGODLIKE

Gas Powered Games (of *Supreme Commander* and *Dungeon Siege*) have revealed *Demigod* – an action RTS based on *Defense of the Ancients*.

## UNIVERSAL COMBAT FREE

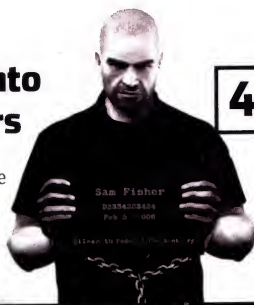
*Universal Combat*, a game that simulates what some think space combat will be like, is now free to download here: [snipurl.com/unicombat](http://snipurl.com/unicombat)



26

## Getting Into Characters

We weigh up the best and worst game characters the PC has ever seen.



41

## Opening The Orange Box

Valve go through their latest masterpiece with a fine-toothed comb.



60

## Wrath of the Lich King

Everything you need to know about the upcoming expansion to MMO giant *World of Warcraft*.



Can't quite tell...



...what's going on here.



In this world there are mysteries, there are monsters and there are some very, very dark conspiracies



The Boar and the Pilgrim, how very Olde English.

### What games, films or literature have influenced *The Secret World*?

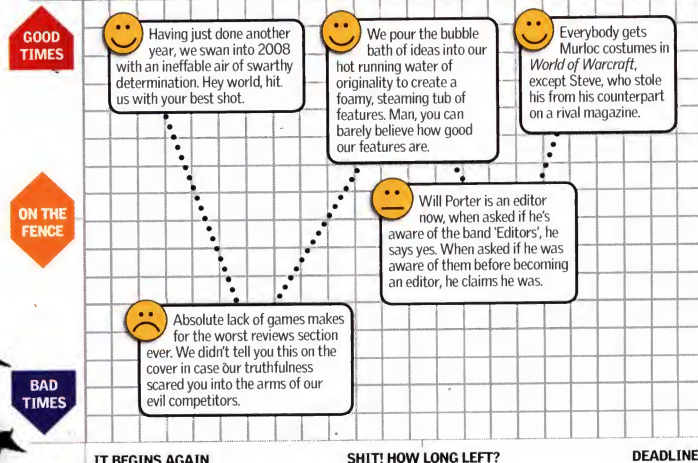
The game director for *The Secret World*, Ragnar Tørnquist, is a man who reads many books and watches a lot of movies. I just ran into his office and posed him this same question, and after thinking long and hard (in fear of saying something that would reveal too much), his eyes turned sinister and he whispered... *The Ring*.



### STUFF

The last *Penumbra* game had us shitting ourselves to a ridiculous degree, by means of its all-encompassing darkness, freaky creatures and one well-timed wolf sound effect. The final chapter of the duology, *Black Plague*, will be out within weeks of you reading this. This is a continuation of the first's storyline, and will likely contain more howls, mystery, and a surprising implementation of a physics system. We'll have a full review next issue.

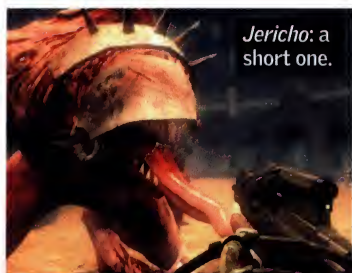
## LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER





# SHORT CIRCUIT

Getting to the long and the short of shrinking PC games



*Jericho: a short one.*



**Reporter**  
Pavel Barter

**D**URING THE creation of aquatic masterpiece, *BioShock*, Irrational Studios couldn't figure out how long their game was going to be. Creepy little girls? Check. Violent oafs in diving suits? Check. The number of gameplay hours? Um...

Developers find it easy to predict the length of a shooter, as the genre's linear. But *BioShock's* more open nature was far more troublesome.

"When we started focus testing, there was a huge time variance from one player to another," says Bill Gardner, lead level designer on the game. "Our concerns mostly came from people who were taking too long rather than people ploughing through, so we had to find ways to guide players along without holding their hands too much. This scared the shit out of us at first."

*BioShock* ended up with around 15+ hours of gameplay – at least, it did for people who ogled the Art Deco eye candy and rifled through the pockets of cadavers – but some players were pissed off with its brevity. *BioShock* represents a wider trend in PC games, as 30+ hour extravaganzas appear to have become things of the past. *Condemned* clocked in at around seven hours, *F.E.A.R.* was a couple more, and *Call of Duty 4* and *BlackSite* are shorter than Danny DeVito. Then there are RPGs: sprawling goliaths of gaming, historically. And yet, *Fable* took less than 15 hours to complete, *Morrowind* was way longer than *Oblivion*, and *Fallout 3's* main quest will last a mere 20 hours. Are we being short-changed? Richard Garriott,



*Morrowind: a trillion hours long.*

creator of the *Ultima* series and new third-person shooter MMO *Tabula Rasa*, says not: "The average game may have shortened a bit, but in the old days, few ever saw the latter half of a game's content, which was a waste, so investing in the quality of a shorter experience is often a good investment."

## GOLIATHS

Garriott, who's taking a rocket into space in October 2008 (no joke, he's becoming the sixth space tourist), estimates that his early *Ultima* games had from 40 to 100 hours of content. But in the '80s, when PC games were made from volcanic rock and buffalo hide, developers didn't even discuss lengths. They had a 'we'll see how long it is when we're done' attitude. "Now we plan our initial play time early in the process," says Garriott.



*COD4: a plump six hours.*



The Witcher provides oodles of content.



## Brief encounters

Dave Grossman, lead designer of *Sam & Max*, on why size doesn't matter

**Q** Why did you decide on a 2-3 hour length for each episode of the *Sam & Max* serials?

**A** The length of a game is part of the balancing act of the monthly release schedule. Episodes need to be long enough to satisfy the audience for a while, but not so long that you won't be ready for another one four weeks later. We think a few hours is a good length, as it's not much different from the time you'd spend watching a TV show over that same period.

**Are gamers tired of games that take 20+ hours to complete?**

Developers have been gathering a lot of statistical data on how people play

games, and one thing that pops out often is that they tend not to finish them. I suspect this comes of aging gamers no longer having so much time to devote to play, rather than from any particular weariness, but that's largely conjecture. In any case, I put a lot of work into designing a game, and I want to be sure people finish so they can see every last bit.

**Is the trend of shortening games happening in other game genres, as well as adventures?**

I think all types of games have been getting shorter for a long time. *Portal* is a terrific example: it's really cool, but finishable in just a few hours.

Blam! You'll blast through *BioShock* in a few days.



## People don't want to spend three months toiling over a shooter

The length of a game gives the developer insight into its requirements, from soundtrack to level assets, voice-acting to script. According to Joe Falke, game designer behind *Clive Barker's Jericho*, different factors came into play when deciding on *Jericho*'s length – team size, development time, and budget. "We measured those factors against Clive's original vision for the game," he says.

"Another contributing factor was how much story we could pack into 45 minutes of cutscenes. After making all these projections, we sat down with Clive and plotted out the story with these constraints in mind." The finished result: seven hours, or so, of content.

But there are unsavoury reasons for shorter games. Explorations into new

technologies, cross-platform constraints, and tight deadlines, can all reduce a game from a giant haystack to a weeping willow. Cost counts too, says Falke. "Every extra 10 minutes you throw into a game costs more money, man hours and design. Someone has to sit and generate the assets for a new section of level. Subsidiary costs also rise: every extra 10 minutes must also be sent through QA."

On the whole shorter games are less a product of tight-fisted accountants, and more due to consumer demand. These days, games are considered much like movies or books – most people don't want to spend three months toiling over a shooter. Valve released stats showing that only half of players finished *Episode One*, and that's only five hours long.

"It's the basic ideology that modern gamers would rather have five hours of a Hollywood blockbuster, than 10 hours of pretty good content," says Falke.

Like a flamboyant guest at a house party, sometimes games are better when they don't outstay their welcome. *Portal*'s three hours seemed just right, and there's an argument to be made that

the first *Half-Life* trailed off around the Xen levels, while *HL2* was bang on the money. If a game ends without leaving you feeling frustrated and unsatisfied, then perhaps it's done a good job. Conversely, a game that lasts hundreds of hours can be a massive turn-off.

## EXTRA GIRTH

Ultimately, content should determine length, rather than the other way around. This was a mantra that the *BioShock* team kept in mind.

"We did not arbitrarily add content to inflate our game's length," says Gardner. "It's a sin to create a generic, repetitive experience just so you can write 'Over 40 hours of gameplay' on the box."

Despite a few miffed punters, who wanted more Bio-bang for their buck, it is worth remembering that the game dwarfed *System Shock 2* in content.

"Putting aside all the polish and custom events, the sheer size of *BioShock*'s maps are probably twice the size of *SS2*," continues Gardner. "We knew early on that we wanted to make a much faster, more intense experience than *SS2*. This meant that the spaces had to be much larger to support the combats. To put it simply, the fights with the Big Daddies would not have been possible on the Von Braun."

Perhaps the biggest concern over shrinking games surrounds RPGs. Where are the 100-hour RPGs of yore? MMOs come to the rescue here: "*Tabula Rasa* has a couple of hundred hours of baseline content if you are just running to reach the initial level cap of level 50," says Garriott. "Plus every few weeks we add more content, more missions, more maps, more features, so it is growing all the time."

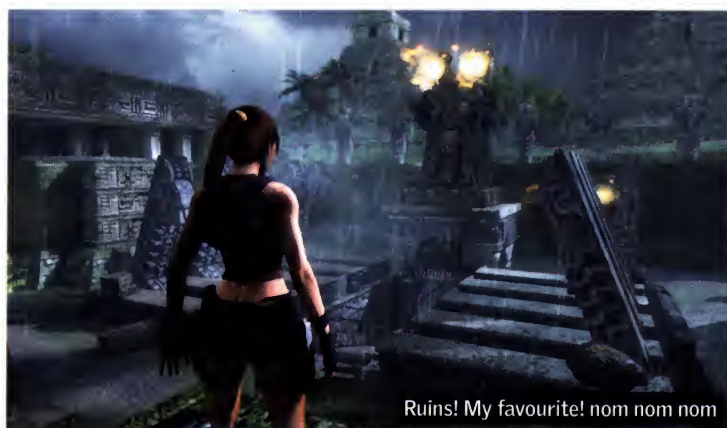
Ultimately, we should get what we expect from a game, according to its genre. From a puzzle, racing or sports game: unlimited replayability. From a shooter: multiple hours of rip-roaring action. From RPGs: weeks of glazy-eyed keyboard tapping. From *The Sims*: the usual load of bollocks. It's all about quality of content, as Bill Gardner says. And a £25 PC game should rightfully have more quality content than any other medium out there. **PCZ**

**Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)**

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2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw







UNDER WHERE?

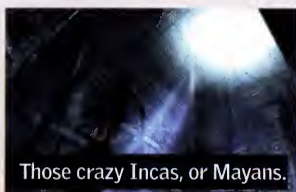
# TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

ETA  
Q4  
2008

Jon Blyth ties up the loose legends

DEVELOPER Crystal Dynamics PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE [www.eidos.com](http://www.eidos.com)**THE LOWDOWN**

- May the *Tomb Raider* regeneration continue! ✓
- More of the same, but better ✓
- Her navel now has its own physics engine ✓
- Most realistic muddy legs ever ✓
- There's only so realistic a CGI breast can be ✗



**W**HEN THE *TOMB Raider* series was hanging from a ledge, *Legend* gave Lara the leg up she needed to shoot the cynical dogs of the gaming press. Then *Anniversary* remade the first game, and gave our nostalgia a massive upgrade.

While it may have ruined the original for anyone daft enough to have played the two side-by-side, but it still allowed everyone to relive the excellence and novelty of the game's fundamentals. Both games were just true enough and just new enough to please everyone except the most gap-weary and jump-jaded. And that's why we're looking forward to *Underworld*, Eidos and Crystal Dynamics' new Croft title.

However, if you played through *Legend*, you may have been struck by

the abruptness of the conclusion. The lack of finality, the relative ease of the final boss, and the suspicion that someone had cut out a part of your game. Having pieced together Excalibur, you didn't even get much of a pop at trying out the 'awesome powers' it gave to you. It hardly ruined the game, and you could argue that it left the player wanting more – but if that was the point, they shouldn't have taken a year to remake the original for *Anniversary*. That's going a little beyond delayed satisfaction, it's more like forgetfulness.

So in a paragraph of spoilers, let's recap where we're at. Lara pieced together Excalibur, and used it to duff up that demon-fused cowbag Amanda. It was revealed in a gently foreseeable twist that she (possibly) killed your mum, and the sequel is based on the reappearance at the end of the game of the portal that warped away your dear old gal. This leads to the Underworld.

With every new *Tomb Raider* game comes a bewildering array of technological boasts about Lara's 'unprecedented realism'. With *Underworld*, we've sunk to new lows.

"The model for Lara Croft is a showcase of art and technology," screams Crystal Dynamics' director Eric Lindstrom, who is at pains to emphasise that over a dozen layers are used to create her skin tone, and how light reflects off her shins when she back

flips onto a ledge. Lindstrom is also keen to point out that Lara will look "wet, sweaty, dirty and muddy," suggesting that the new *Tomb Raider* games will be somewhere between feather-soft erotica and a Daz advert.

The technology is not purely focussed on aesthetics, as there'll be an impact on the gameplay too. People are talking about levels having fewer grids and right angles, as they are distanced ever further from their triangular roots in the original. Not to mention the new ways in which the environment, like the gorillas, will be your enemy. But in terms of mould-breaking new ground for Lara, consider us equally sceptical and hopeful.

More tangible efforts are going into the realism of the new games: permanent effects on the game world, corpses that don't vanish, ledges that become treacherous in the rain, and mud that washes off when you swim.

Taking the piss when you hear claims that realistic mud management and corpse persistence is part of the next generation of gaming is easy, but it's also impossible to deny that the *Tomb Raider* franchise is in good hands. We love the *Tomb Raider* games for what they are – campy you-go-girl cool, that's so uncool it's brilliant, and some awesome level design. So we're looking forward to *Underworld*, daft new features and all. **PCZ**

**A light drizzle does wonders**

Just look where that money's going

Hark at that newfangled *Tomb Raider* weather. Now look at Lara on the next page – that's one wet lady, and millions have probably been spent to make her look this soggy. The light reflected in the stream of water trickling down her arm goes through dozens – maybe billions, although we doubt it – of calculations before your computer can tell your monitor which colour to make a pixel. We can only imagine what she'd look like when she jogs through a waterfall – like some kind of ooze creature. And the end result? Well, she looks a bit slimy, to be honest. Perhaps there's a medkit which also contains some oil-absorbing pore cleansers.





THE STORY SO FAR...  
**CRYSTAL  
DYNAMICS**

**BLOOD OMEN**  
Core Design gaming design strength is shown with the *Legacy Of Kain*.



**SOUL REAVER**  
Young upstart Razei's follow-ups were good, but unfinished and buggy.

**LEGEND**  
Core Design revives Croft and the win the love of Eidos, with *Tomb Raider Legend*.



**ANNIVERSARY**  
CD surpass themselves with the remake of the original, bringing Lara into the 21st century.

1996

1999

2006

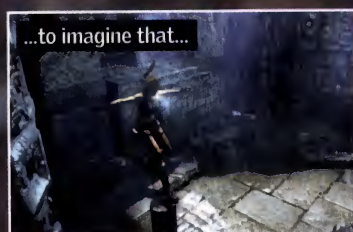
2007



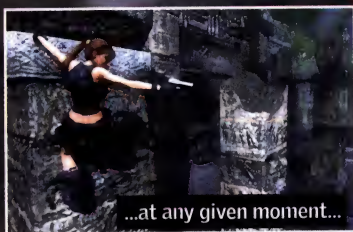
In any *Tomb Raider* screenshot...



...it always helps...



...to imagine that...



...at any given moment...



...Lara has just...



...let rip with a massive wet fart.

The new *Tomb Raider* games will be somewhere between feather-soft erotica and a Daz advert



**PCZONE  
CHARTS**

- 1 ↑ **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008**  
Issue 188 90%
- 2 ↓ **CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**  
Issue 188 89%
- 3 ↑ **THE SIMS 2**  
Issue 147 82%
- 4 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: BON VOYAGE**  
Issue 188 38%
- 5 ↓ **CRYSIS**  
Issue 188 92%
- 6 ↓ **UNREAL TOURNAMENT III**  
Issue 189 90%
- 7 ↑ **THE ORANGE BOX**  
Issue 187 n/a
- 8 ↑ **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008**  
Issue 188 71%
- 9 NEW **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST**  
N/A
- 10 ↓ **SIM CITY: SOCIETIES**  
Issue 189 61%
- 11 ↑ **GEARS OF WAR**  
Issue 188 90%
- 12 ↑ **COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS**  
Issue 180 85%
- 13 ↑ **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**  
N/A
- 14 ↓ **EMPIRE EARTH III**  
Issue 189 72%
- 15 RE **HELLGATE: LONDON**  
Issue 188 74%
- 16 RE **THE WITCHER**  
Issue 188 88%
- 17 RE **WORLD IN CONFLICT**  
Issue 186 92%
- 18 ↑ **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**  
Issue 175 91%
- 19 RE **THE SETTLERS: RISE OF AN EMPIRE**  
Issue 187 74%
- 20 ↓ **AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE ASIAN DYNASTIES**  
Issue 188 77%



1

**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008**

Riding high like a spiky needle in the sea of sales, it's the bladder-booting waltz that has been danced since time began.



7

**THE ORANGE BOX**

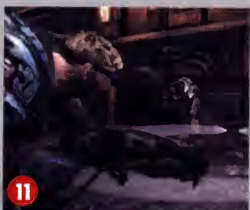
The triptychal triumvirate tried with no small success to be the triumphant troika of 2007. A triple treat with virtually no tribbles.



3

**THE SIMS 2**

It is a game you play where you have little persons inside your TV machine and they like dogs and holidays and don't like smells.



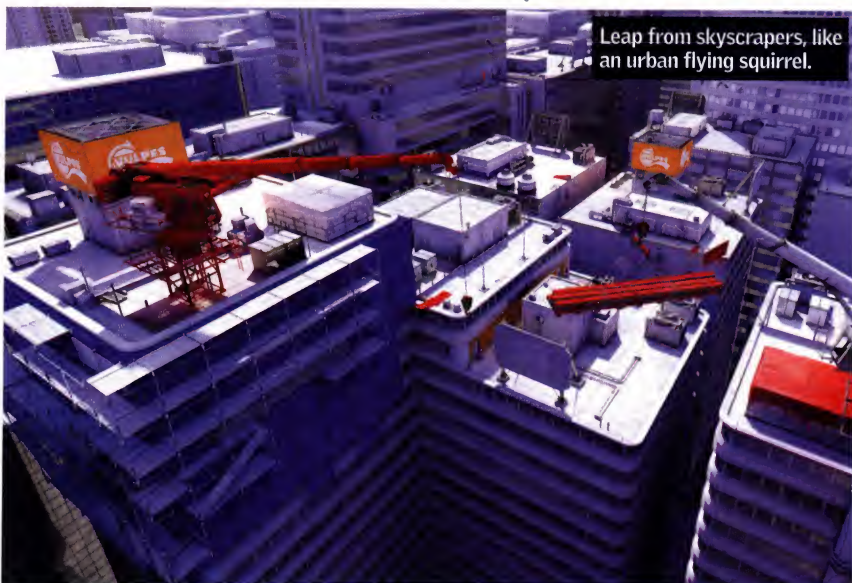
11

**GEARS OF WAR**

Like copping a wet slap off a thick lamb chop, *GOW* pummels your bonce with a brown rainbow of mouth-bloating bangs.

**OVER-  
WRITTEN  
SPECIAL!**

Remember rule one of parkour: don't jump into a helicopter's rotors.



Leap from skyscrapers, like an urban flying squirrel.

# HOP, SKIP, AND LONG JUMP

*Mirror's Edge* leaps around with gay abandon

www.on-mirrors-edge.com | ETA: 2008

**REMEMBER PARKOUR? SOME** French people were doing it a while ago, jumping along buildings like giant, confused squirrels. They managed to impress enough people to become something of an inspirational fad, appearing in a James Bond movie and an episode of *Top Gear*. Now DICE are getting in on it by "putting the person back into first-person".

With *Mirror's Edge*, they hope to give players a far greater feeling of physical presence in the game world than your typical 'camera on a stick' shooter.

Your character, Faith (as in 'leap of'), traverses a utopian cityscape, evading an authoritarian

government rather than taking them head on. Much like *Assassin's Creed* (which should be showing up on PC sometime this year) except with less Jerusalem.

Every aspect of your movement in the game is intended to feel weighty and to impact on the environment, effectively creating a far more engaging world.

This game is heavily console-led, thanks to a control system intrinsically bound to a pad, but regardless, it's looking extremely interesting both in its graphic style and its potentially revolutionary way of running up a wall.



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

# The guys keeping your virtual arse in the sky

MICROSOFT GAMES STUDIOS - DEVELOPERS OF THE MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIM SERIES

The Microsoft *Flight Simulator* series can be traced back as far as 30 years ago, and it remains a technological benchmark as well as a fondly regarded PC tradition. Microsoft tells us how it stays airborne.

**Q** How many people work on the *Flight Simulator* games?

**A** The total number of people changes depending on the of development stage the project. During high concept the team is the smallest, with only about 5-10 people working on some prototypes. At peak times of production or testing it can be as many as 40 to 50 people.

**Who are your fanbase? Are they mainly real pilots, or just enthusiasts?**

*Flight Simulator* has always had an interesting mix of customers because it really is a product where you can pick your own experience. We have some people who

are very passionate about procedures and how everything works in the cockpit. Other people love to just fly, and want simple controls but a lot of aircraft and scenery.

Others are excited by the structured experiences we added in the form of missions and racing. And a lot of customers are simply enamoured with everything about aviation and just love anything and everything to do with the experience.

**The technology behind FSX is incredible. Has anybody asked to use the engine for other purposes? Like military purposes, or advertising?**

As the PC has become more ubiquitous in everyday business and life, there are many interesting opportunities for the technology and we have been asked by many people about other uses.

Just this past month we announced Microsoft *ESP*. That's a visual simulation platform that brings immersive games-based technology to training and learning, decision support, and research and development modelling for government and commercial organizations. There is



Other energy drinks are available...

tremendous potential in this area and the work we do here is going to make the *Flight Simulator* experience even better as well.

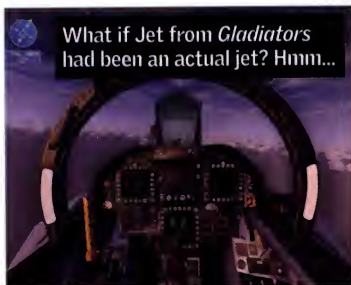
**What's with your recent fascination with UFOs? The game's missions have become a lot more exciting lately...**

That's down to our Lead Designer and Resident Conspiracy Theorist, Paul Lange: he's influence. It was a result of our deliberate intention to inject a little bit of fun into the experience. *Flight Simulator* is

a great way for aviation fans to try things they will never get to do for real, like air racing at Reno, or intercepting a UFO.

**Speaking of which, whatever happened to *Combat Flight Simulator*?**

We haven't announced anything about *Combat Flight Simulator* as this point. Within the team there are a lot of people who are very passionate about it, I can assure you. It's a very broad and deep field to narrow down to a single product as well.



What if Jet from *Gladiators* had been an actual jet? Hmm...

## tat Zone

Tat is leaking into the North Sea, and bedecking local marine life with unwanted keyrings and inane merchandise. Only last month, a noble hammerhead shark was stunned by a barrage of plush vortigaunts. This must never happen again, and you can help - by paying good money for the kind of stuff we get for free and really don't want. Every single penny goes to charity, so dig extra deep in them pockets, you stingy ringpieces. Look for the 'PCZoners' seller on eBay.

Buy our tat at [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk)  
All proceeds go to charity. Honest.  
[www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org](http://www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org)



### THIS MONTH'S TAT



**WOW TRADING CARDS**  
From the *Winter Veil* expansion kit - actually good quality tat.



**INEXPLICABLE DIARY**  
Create an impression of worldliness with a foreign diary.



**PEN MAGNET SET**  
A pen and a magnet, together at last.



**POPCAP GOODIE BAG**  
Includes a couple of Chuzzles, a game, and a tiny T-shirt.

*I'm the tatman, bada bwi ba ba bada bo, ba ba bada bo, ski baba bada bo, yeah*

### THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	<b>CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO FINGER</b> Point accusingly and anonymously at evil ~people with this useful pre-detached finger.	£5.50	3
	<b>FOOTBALL MANAGER MUG</b> Tea drinkers will hurl their mugs into the sky, seeing this superior beverage pit.	£10.50	8
	<b>RACE CAP</b> The lowest price for a gaming garment since that 27p <i>Daikatana</i> wristband, *sigh*	£1.04	3
	<b>GAMECOCKSUCKS T-SHIRT</b> We're not entirely sure what's going on here, but it all sounds jolly rude. Good show, what what.	£2.70	7





Dear Steve,

After hearing about *Left 4 Dead*'s fast zombies, I was aghast, appalled, and believed it to be an abomination. The fantastic thing about zombies is that they're slow, groaning, and ever-present – part of the scariness is their slowness, in that you know they are always slowly but surely shuffling towards you. Fast, wall-climbing zombies are basically angry flesh-eating stray cats. What the fudge!

Ed Zitron

Dear Ed,

No, no, no. As ever you are stupid and wrong. Fast zombies are the new wave. They're hip, they are 'in'. A shambling zombie is stupidly easy to avoid, whereas a fast one is super scary and far more dangerous. You're just a purist, mindlessly maintaining the status quo – like a zombie! A slow one, whose resistance to change is almost offensive.

Steve Hogarty

Steve,

Do you relish in stupidity, or is it just your nature? Are you unable to read my words? Do you delight in being a nonsense merchant, paddling your canoe of moronitude into an ocean of slow-wittedness? You lack the imagination to understand the fear that a slow, endless horde of slowly advancing monsters is more frightening than one or two jumpy-wumpy creatures that can do all kinds of flips. Zombies are caused by a disease. Diseases are more scary when they take time to progress. You fool.

EZ

Ed,

Zombies aren't real. Stop acting like they're based in some sort of solid, unchangeable fact. The zombie canon allows for various species of zombie – viral, magical, musical, it's all fair game. It just happens that they're fast now, and faster is better. You haven't played *Left 4 Dead* (or seen *28 Days Later*) yet either so I'm just going to relax and let the passing of time prove you absolutely wrong.

SH

Steve,

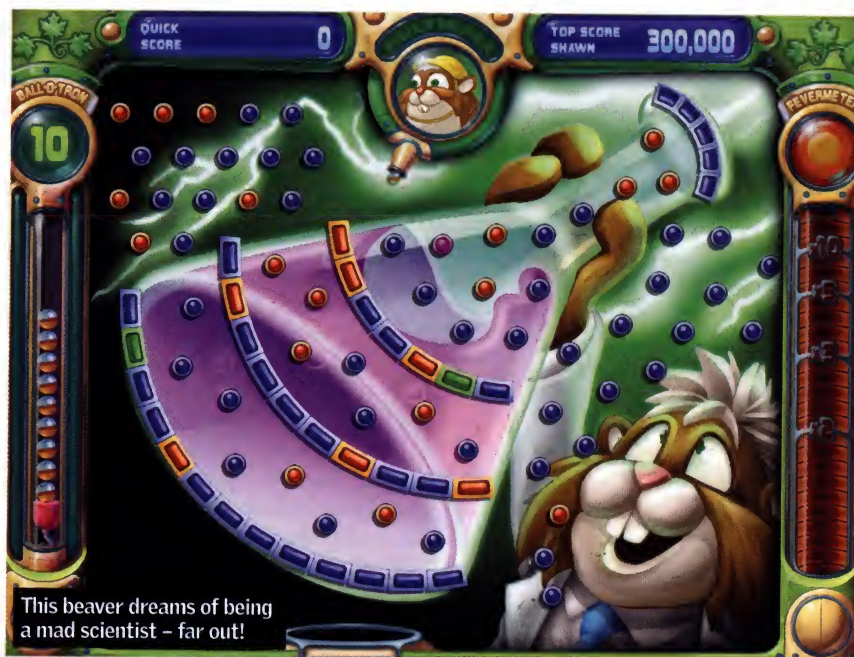
Fast is not better. Fast is worse. It's a break from what zombies actually are, and I maintain that you are some young buck trying to change everything and agreeing with things that are not as they should be. What do you know? Have you ever seen a zombie film that isn't *Shaun of the Dead*? Get out of my garden! Your ignorance is a blight on all things living.

EZ

Ed,

I have seen every film. Shut up.

SH



## ODE TO JOY

**Peggle Nights threatens to drag us back into the Institute** [www.popcap.com](http://www.popcap.com) | ETA: 2008

**BEING CLASSED AS** a 'quasi-sequel' to the original *Peggle* (that stupid, addictive game with the pegs we won't stop going on about), *Peggle Nights* is PopCap's bid to plumb the depths of the *Peggle* characters' wildly varied personalities. The images we've been given are clearly work in progress – unless PopCap really are going for concept sketch themed levels, but they hint at the sort of astounding fun we might be having when the game finally slides into our Steam accounts.

Expect 65 new levels, themed around each character's dreams and aspirations, and one new character (ohmigod) whose special power is currently a mystery. There'll be five secret PopCap-themed levels, new skill shots, and, according to an email from the game's developers themselves, "other cool stuff".

While *Peggle Nights* is in its early days, we're so embarrassingly anxious about it already, we're ready to weep extreme peggle tears, and then do an extreme slide into a vat of joy.



# WELCOME BACK, COMMANDO

New *Tiberium* information screams into our hands [www.ea.com/tiberium](http://www.ea.com/tiberium) | ETA: Q3 2008

**SIX YEARS AGO** *Command & Conquer* dipped a confused ankle into the shooter genre, and the result – *Renegade* – was a buggy, multiplayer blast that didn't impress anyone. Realising, perhaps, that the franchise's strength is in the tactical department, Westwood Studios have announced that their new shooter, *Tiberium*, will be considerably more strategic than its fairly mindless dad.

Already two years in development, the action will be squad based, with the player taking the role of Ricardo Vega. As is obvious from the title, the game'll be set in the original *C&C* universe, with a plotline 11 years after the events of the Third Tiberium War covered in *C&C3*. So the world's in a state – half of Europe is wiped out, the once-oceanic Mediterranean is a toxic tiberium-filled wasteland, and the Nod are treating

those alien towers like they've just seen Jesus in their toast.

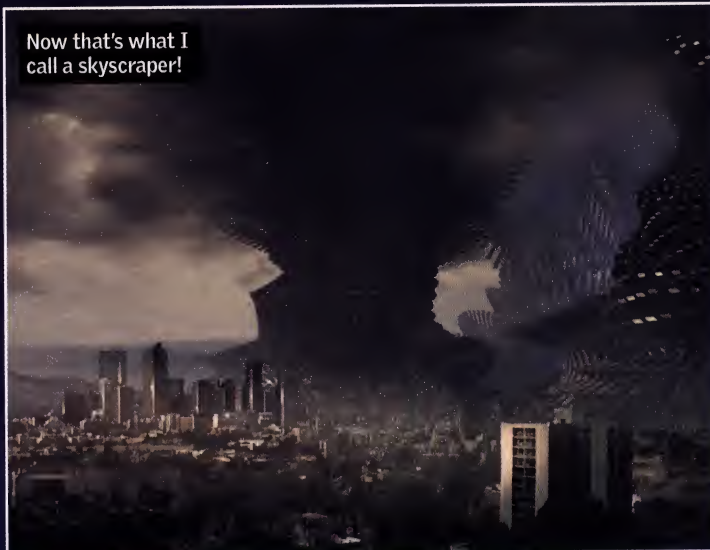
EA are keen to emphasise the new and innovative elements of gameplay that will make *Tiberium* unique, elements slightly pinched from the stable of *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*, with troop deployment taking place on a pop-up map, a little like *GRAW*'s CrossCom. Moreover, the RTS roots even show in details like resource management – gaining control of tiberium points will give Vega command over more troops. And his weapon – the D-10 – is so flexible as to be all weapons in one.

EALA seems to be paying such respect and attention to the name's strategic heritage, that nothing sounds too discouraging so far. We'll have loads more information in next month's *Command & Conquer* special.



A squad! Hmmm...

Now that's what I call a skyscraper!



Exciting lasers.



The future is bright.





# Getting into

**PC ZONE** present the **10 best** conceived characters

**T**HE HUMBLE PC has given life to countless imaginary people. But which could have leapt from the pages of a far-fetched George Eliot novel, and who was the creation of a lonely coder sitting in the dark with a half-concealed erection?

As we count down the 10 best and worst characters in PC gaming the only rule is we're only allowed one character from each game (or else *Half-Life 2* would take over, and this issue of *PC ZONE* would become a complete Valve love-in). So join us as we praise the worthy, and damn the emotionally void.



## Carla Valenti (*Fahrenheit*)

The plot goes off on one in *Fahrenheit*, but the subtly acted charms of NYPD investigator Carla never fade – whether she's sparking dialogue off detective partner Tyler or pacing around her flat brooding on an unsolved case. Her steady, believable nature holds the game together as affairs get progressively loopier – only stalling when she gives in and jumps the bones of a killer who's literally stone cold. Still, one of the few ladies of the videogame world who you could take home to meet your parents.



## Garrett (*Thief* series)

He's a quiet man by nature, but when master thief Garrett cracks open his yaw it's usually to let slip a wonderful piece of situational sarcasm. A medieval Sam Fisher of sorts, his attitude is cynical, and his pre-level monologues are rife with dry, smirking humour that marks him firmly in our books as a cool dude. Outside of this, his ability to stash so many candelabras and paintings under his cloak is admirable. And he's got a mechanical eye too, and he's amazingly modest about it. If we had a mechanical eye we'd probably tell everybody, all the time.



## Psycho (*Crysis*)

Who thought that *Call of Duty 2*, with its potato masher-obsessed cockneys, could be beaten in terms of pure Brit-accent wrongness? And why another Londoner? What's wrong with a supersoldier from Dudley? Psycho is the worst of the clichés on show in *Crysis*, narrowly beating the gruff general and Prophet the even gruffer squad leader, in terms of pure bloody-minded naffness. Just who needs this barrage of 'bollocks!' from a resident East End barrow boy? And what does he do that's so 'psycho' anyway? While he's bitching we're the ones running around throwing Koreans into the sea...

**Who needs this barrage of 'bollocks!' from an East End barrow boy?**



## Marcus Fenix (*Gears of War*)

When you're some of the last remaining humans on the planet Sera capable of stopping the deadly Locust Horde, the last thing you want is to be bothered with is grumpy whining. Marcus Fenix is a mish-mash of Deckard from *Blade Runner* and Eeyore from *Winnie the Pooh*, constantly lamenting the situation and grumbling at any levity and delighting only in the occasional profanity. Desperately in need of a hug, or maybe a tug, Fenix is the least likeable hero since Billy Zane played The Phantom.



# Characters...

C gaming, and the **10 worst**

## LeChuck (Monkey Island series)

Guybrush Threepwood and Stan the Used Ship Salesman were stars, but it was the evil Pirate LeChuck who became the poster boy/ghost/zombie/demon of the *Monkey Island* series. Whether he's partying on his ghost ship with his skeletal shipmates, chasing the heart of Governor Marley (she told him to "drop dead" – so he did) or brilliantly turning out to be Guybrush's bullying older brother in the depths of an amusement park pirate ride at the close of *Monkey Island 2*, LeChuck is one of gaming's great undead heroes. "I laugh at you and your puny voodoo tinkerings!"

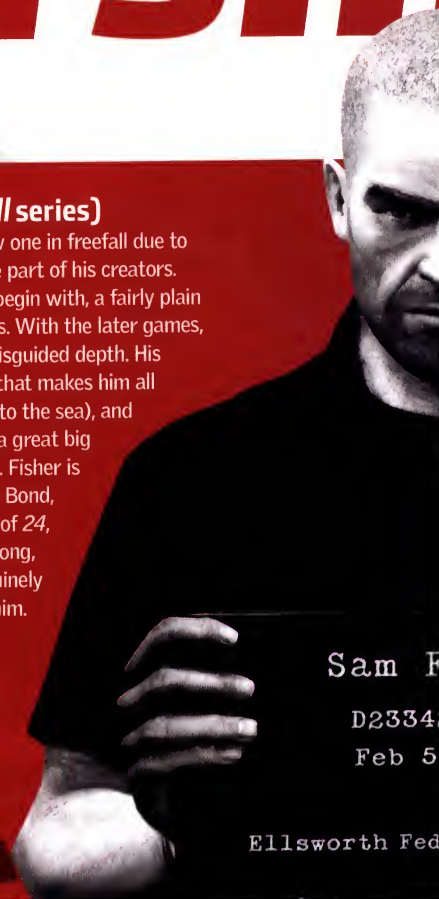


LeChuck – the best pirate gaming's ever known.



## Sam Fisher (Splinter Cell series)

Once a great, iconic character – now one in freefall due to a genuine lack of imagination on the part of his creators. The man was barely identifiable to begin with, a fairly plain superspy with no particular agendas. With the later games, Ubisoft have crowbarred in some misguided depth. His daughter dies (we don't know her), that makes him all depressed (he throws his goggles into the sea), and makes us feel like we're controlling a great big sulking sod for the rest of the game. Fisher is currently in the malaise of Brosnan Bond, long ago and it's now genuinely difficult to care about him.

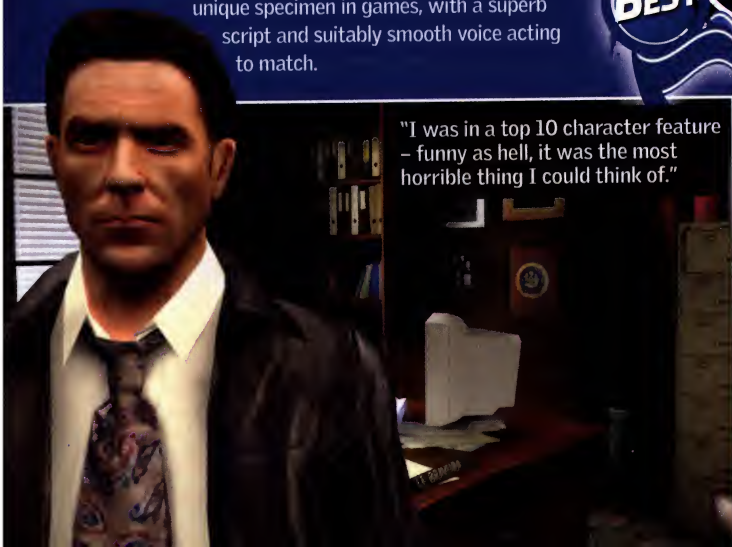


Sam F  
D2334  
Feb 5

Ellsworth Fed

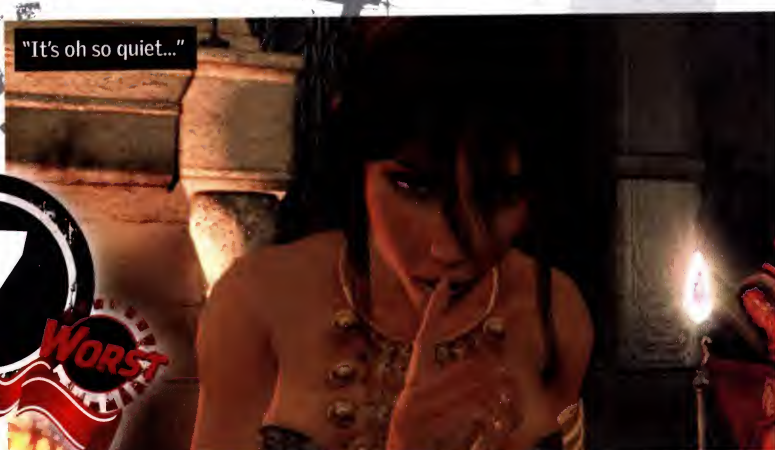
## Max Payne (Max Payne series)

The game is a relatively mindless shooter wrapped in a veil of cinematic spectacle, but the titular character's setup – his downfall – is one of the best motivations for level after level of slow-motion death dealing we've ever known. Prancing about in his guilt-ridden nightmares, unable to reach his wife and child before they're viciously murdered – these might've been rubbish levels, but they gave an extra dimension to his character, something games of this ilk can rarely achieve. He might be a film noir cliché, but Max Payne is a relatively unique specimen in games, with a superb script and suitably smooth voice acting to match.



"I was in a top 10 character feature – funny as hell, it was the most horrible thing I could think of."

"It's oh so quiet..."



## Xana (Dark Messiah)

The *Might & Magic* universe isn't known for its big laughs, and *Dark Messiah* is no comedy. Full of names like Phenrig, Menelag, and Kha Beleth, this is earnest high fantasy that should only even attempt carefully considered comedy that springs naturally from the characters of the cast. Xana is a weak attempt – a dirty wee sex-obsessive who lives inside your brain, trying to get you to be naughty and talking like Hattie Jacques before she passed the sex-kitten baton to Barbara Windsor. She was entertainment, fair enough – but with Xana, you only ever felt like you were laughing at the game and the scriptwriters, not with them...





## Mortimer 'Morte' Rictusgrin (*Planescape: Torment*)

Everyone has a friend they don't really like – an abusive arsehole who lives to see you suffer, but who you still like having around. Mortimer Rictusgrin – Morte to his friends – is exactly that guy... well, head. He's a sarcastic, lying and stunningly witty flying skull. By the end he accepts the blame for the lives he's destroyed (including repeatedly causing the death the immortal, amnesiac Nameless One – your character) but is redeemed through his friendship with you. Amongst a pack of memorable characters, Morte is the one you love *Planescape* for.

"Jazz hands!  
Oh... wait..."



**Morte is the character you love *Planescape* for...**



Tommy – we have our reservations (lol).

## Tommy (*Prey*)

As much as we share Tommy's sceptical stance on the dualism of body and spirit, we like to think that we're open-minded enough to change our minds, should we find ourselves using that very spirit to navigate a gravity-mangled spaceship. And any justifiable doubts about the afterlife should be wiped out after you've been taken there a number of times, and bestowed with magical powers that you immediately start using. Although *Prey* has a number of memorable moments, the Cherokee-in-denial and protagonist Tommy provides precisely none of them. You know a character has failed to engage you when you gleefully kill your own love interest.

## Alyx Vance (*Half-Life 2* and *Episodes*)

On the upside, Alyx is a strong female character who is well-realised, scripted, and acted. Although her jokes can fall flat (naming the zombines, for example), that's only human, and the times where you trigger one of her hidden phrases in *Episode One* made you feel like you were fighting alongside someone you actually liked. Hardy bullet sponge that she is, you still felt protective, and when she pranked you with her torch, you really did want to slap her. In *Episode Two* she may as well have been replaced with a talking keyring that says "Thank goodness you're alive", "I thought... for a minute..." and "This way!", but the final sequence reminded everyone why they cared so much...

"Gordon! Thank goodness you're alright."



## Prince of Persia (*POP: Warrior Within*)

Whose idea was it to have the Prince regress into an angst-ridden teenage state? The same dead-eyed idiot who messed up Sam Fisher we suppose, trying to increase his appeal by making him 'edgier', 'hip' and 'eternally tormented'. The prince has gone 'bad', he's 'rogue', and he's got 'problems' he doesn't want to talk about – look, just check his MySpace. He was embarrassing at the best of times, but the latest game pushes the envelope by delivering dialogue that's on par with that bit in *Spider-Man 3* where Peter Parker went emo. Still, it made impaling him on spikes that little bit more fun.

The Prince – gone bad.







A lovely chap, despite the madness.

### Sander Cohen (*BioShock*)

Rapture is full of mad bastards, but our favourite is this particular mad bastard – whose underlying theme is that of the inflated artistic ego (or Ayn Rand or something clever like that). We're introduced to Cohen's madness with a brilliant scene in which a tortured pianist struggles to bang out Cohen's masterpiece without fault – ultimately failing and incurring the full brunt of Cohen's lunacy. Andrew Ryan lead the best scene, Atlas has the best lines, Tenenbaum was a vision of maternal loveliness juxtaposed with unethical genetic experimentation (everything got juxtaposed in *BioShock*), but Cohen's relentless theatrics in the face of desolation bowled us over.



### Matt Baker (*Brothers in Arms* series)

*Brothers in Arms*, ostensibly, is a delicate and touching tribute to the men who fought and died for our freedom in World War II. But Matt Baker never seems to be a real person, more a banal rose-tinted Apple Pie-ism. The way he talks as he wistfully stares out of a plane is like he's on *Dawson's* bloody *Creek*, while cutscenes are like watching members of an obscure cult coughing up the more mundane parts of a dictionary. The games may be well meant, and you can't fault the historical accuracy, but if the American GIs that kept on chasing after your gran during WW2 had voices this cloying then the reason she refused to put out is clear.

### HK-47 (*KOTOR* series)

"Shall we find something to kill to cheer ourselves up?" Easily the highlight of the *KOTOR* series, even if they bugged up his storyline in *The Sith Lords*, HK-47 is a cheerfully insane assassin droid. The roots of his madness, brilliantly relayed as you delve into his memory banks, lie with yourself, because you corrupted him as Darth Revan.

With a cheery aristocratic tone, and with a love of the word 'meatbag', you also feel a strange empathy for him: not least when he is unwillingly fitted with the HK Protocol Pacifist Package in *KOTOR 2*.

"Conclusion: There was a brief moment where I felt like I almost understood why some meatbags choose peace and friendship over a high-powered blaster carbine."

**The roots of his madness lie with yourself, because you corrupted him as Darth Revan**



### Kyle Katarn (*Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight* series)

He's bearded, he's boring, he's bland and his name is Kyle Katarn. He was originally a genuinely interesting character in the Han Solo mould working for the Imperials before jumping ship when he found out they'd tortured his dad. But somewhere along the line the decision was made to give him Force powers – and with Force powers comes great responsibility, the emotional resonance of cardboard and the worst beard in videogaming. *Star Wars* may have started out in the '70s, but that's no reason for its gaming icon to dress like a beige-obsessed disco cowboy.



Oh Kyle, always showing off.





## GLaDOS (*Portal*)

Since its release in *The Orange Box*, a massive truck full of gushing plaudits has backed up to *Portal*, opened its doors and swamped the poor game in overwritten analyses and tearful commendations. People didn't just enjoy the absurdity of the Weighted Companion Cube: it descended into a embarrassing internet-wide competition of 'who can fall in love with it the most'.

In the middle of the cake-led catchphrase madness, it's almost possible to forget that *Portal* contains the perfectly-metered, and lyrical voice of GLaDOS. Her descent from the disinterested compliance to a set of mysterious protocols into the hysterical, desperate – and hilariously childish – boss that you tear to pieces is one of the most finely controlled mental breakdowns since *American Psycho*.

GLaDOS is the humorous, clinical, savage and poignant heart of *Portal*. Without her, the Companion Cube would remain unloved and unpersonified, and there'd be no-one to sing that song. There'd also be a lack of idiots thinking that saying "the cake is a lie" makes them as funny as the game, but you take the rough with the smooth. Without GLaDOS, *Portal* would be an entertaining and well-respected puzzler. But it wouldn't have had everyone tearing their nuts off and screaming how much they loved it the most.



## Martin Septim (*Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*)

When it was revealed that Patrick Stewart and Sean Bean would be lending their voice talents to *Oblivion*, we thought we'd have seen the end of the soulless, monotonous verbal dirge that spews from the gobs of the game's moronic residents.

Captain Jean Luc Picard's bleak rendition of Uriel Septim manages to make the Emperor look like a mad old pensioner, but he avoids this list by being killed off so quickly. Sean Bean's character sticks around far longer though, at all times sounding like a man incapable of emotion. His script is a load of wank too, always going on about some rubbish nobody really cares about. Even when he turns into a giant ferocious dragon he's still a bit annoying, and embarrassing to watch – like if your dad turned into a massive mythical creature made of fire. He even talks about turning into a dragon like you'd talk about ordering a coffee.

"One grande cappuccino with an extra shot, and I'll be turning into a dragon to save the world – is there a discount for that?"

Sean Bean may have been a housewife's favourite in *Sharpe*, but stick him in a sound recording studio and he's reduced to a painfully dull oaf.







**SHODAN's not mad – she's consistent and reasonable. She's just reasonable on her own twisted terms**

## SHODAN (System Shock series)

Two robotic matriarchs in the top two positions? It can only speak to our male, fleshy weakness, and the thrill of being overwhelmed. The comparisons quickly run dry, however: *Portal* leaves everything to the imagination – *System Shock* has a strongly defined storyline. SHODAN provides you with a tormentor, an ally, a betrayer. Her story is handled in such a remarkable way; her interaction with you completely natural within the immaculate storyline – it's easy to imagine the *System Shock* games as a movie, but it's the very best example of a filmic storyline playing better as a game.

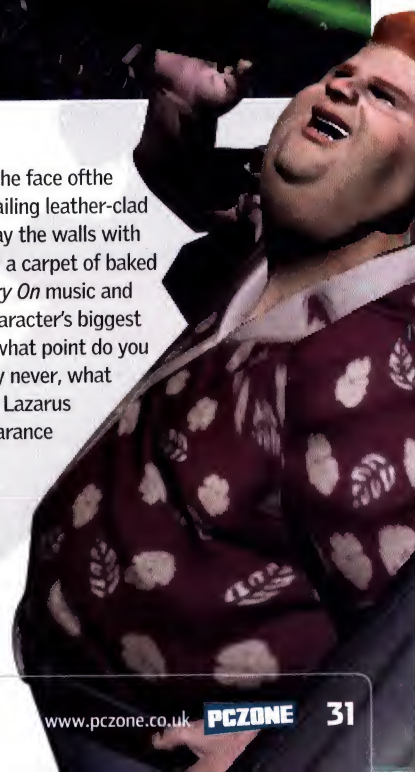
SHODAN is the benevolent chip who had her ethical considerations hacked away, turning her into a passionate megalomaniac, and a casual liar. She's not mad – she's consistent and reasonable. She's just reasonable on her own twisted terms, which, with an inch of empathy, aren't even that twisted.

We've seen SHODAN at her most powerful and her most vulnerable, and although we never once suspected she'd reform and become a dutiful little AI on a mining vessel again, she never failed to be anything other than an enthralling and intelligent enemy and ally. She gets the top spot because she's every definition of awesome.

## Norton Mapes (F.E.A.R.)

Norton Mapes is a cancerous growth on the face of the first-person shooter. One minute you're nailing leather-clad goons to walls and watching arteries spray the walls with claret, the next minute you're standing on a carpet of baked cheese-flavoured snacks, listening to *Carry On* music and being talked at by IT support. When a character's biggest gag is a belt buckle that says 'RTFM', at what point do you realise you're onto a bad idea? Apparently never, what with his magical bullet/explosion evading Lazarus act after *F.E.A.R.* and consequent reappearance in *Extraction Point*.

Based on the Dennis Nedry character from *Jurassic Park*, Norton Mapes is a blight on PC gaming. He stalls the game, he fails to amuse and he's a grotesque stereotype that ties obesity to surliness, duplicity and cowardliness. **PCZ**





NEW YORK GORY...

# ALONE IN THE DARK

*Jamie Sefton* is alone in the dark – the meter's run out and the wife's cleared off...DEVELOPER Eden Games PUBLISHER Atari WEBSITE [www.edengames.com](http://www.edengames.com)

**J**UST IN CASE you haven't brushed up on your ancient games history recently (educational standards are slipping apparently), *Alone In The Dark* was the first 3D 'survival horror' title released back in 1992 and inspired such great Japanese franchises as *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*.

The HP Lovecraft-inspired original has returned, although as we discovered when we first saw *AITD* over two years ago, French developer Eden Games are insistent that this is more of an action-horror game inspired by movies and TV shows such as *Die Hard* or *24*, than a creeping terror title. (Oh, just don't mention the *Alone In The Dark* movie.

Although any movie starring Tara Reid and Stephen Dorff, and produced by the guy behind the *BloodRayne* films is doomed from the start...

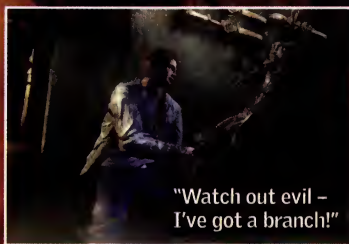
"Some of the most brilliant, exciting and tense entertainment of recent years has been TV series like *24* and *Lost* where you're gripped by a tight dynamic of action, plot twists, character revelation and cliff-hangers," says producer Nour Polloni. "We wanted players to have the same kind of experience with *Alone in the Dark*, so we've used that structure to give us the same kind of narrative dynamic, intertwined with the gameplay. This approach lets us carefully plan each episode to hit the right balance, which puts maximum pressure on the player to keep playing just to see what happens next."

Each episode will be approximately 40-60 minutes of gameplay, but thankfully the original plans of actually releasing the game in these bite-size

ETA  
MARCH

## THE LOWDOWN

- Re-invention of the *Alone In The Dark* horror series ✓
- 4km<sup>2</sup> of satellite-mapped Central Park, New York ✓
- Episodic level structure ✓
- Environmental weapons such as fire ✓
- Will the console controls transfer well to PC? ✗



"Watch out evil – I've got a branch!"



Expect torches.



This is how 'the kids' are driving these days. Bloody kids.

## NY's Burning

Real-time fire is *Alone In The Dark*'s strongest weapon, and already seems overused...

Eden Games have spent well over a year of development perfecting *AITD*'s unscripted blazes. "Fire propagates realistically across any flammable surface – so that means furniture, stuff made out of wood, some inflammable walls, and accelerants such as alcohol," says producer Nour Polloni. "Fire is a very useful ally and there are lots of ways you'll use it in the game both to solve specific situations and of course to burn bad guys – some of whom won't show any sign of giving up until you cook them." Here's an in-game sequence showing Edward Carnby puncturing a car's petrol tank, driving the vehicle, jumping out, then setting fire to the trail of fuel that eventually leads to a rather smashing explosion. Now that's a good use of game development technology...





THE STORY SO FAR...

## EDEN GAMES

### BONJOUR!

French developers Eden Games make their name with classic racing title *V-Rally 2*.

2000

### FORMIDABLE!

Another year, another *V-Rally*: the third in the racing series which got 79% in issue 138.

2002



### PIF! PAF! POOF!

*Test Drive Unlimited* pioneered satellite-mapping and open-ended online racing.

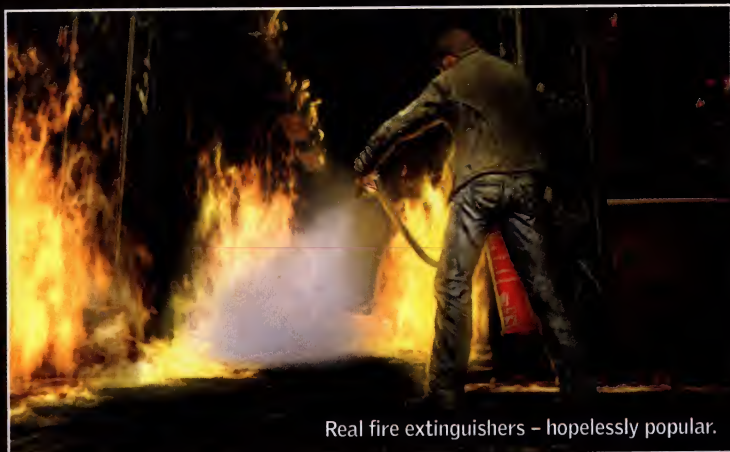
2006



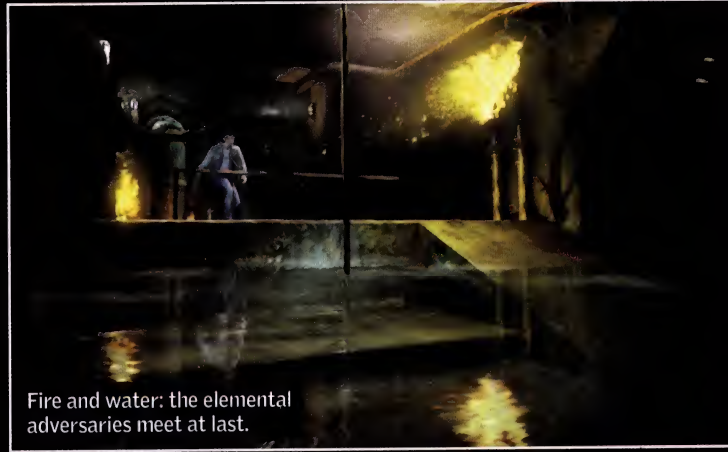
### ZUT ALORS!

Delayed from a planned 2007 release, *Alone In The Dark* is a departure for the driving divas.

2008



Real fire extinguishers – hopelessly popular.



Fire and water: the elemental adversaries meet at last.

## This is more of an action-horror game inspired by movies, rather than a creeping terror title...

chunks has been dropped – episodic gaming, with the exception of the adventures of *Sam & Max*, has been a well-hyped, but short-lived, failure.

### CARNBY STREET

*Alone In The Dark* features the main character of Edward Carnby who is sent to uncover a strange and terrifying mystery at the heart of New York's Central Park. This huge area of the famous US city, which spans over four square kilometres, has been completely recreated in-game using the same

satellite-mapping technology from the developers' last title *Test Drive Unlimited*. The Central Park setting allows the team to have action and set-pieces in Manhattan's busy, crowded buildings and streets, as well as quiet, foreboding forest areas that lend themselves to the spooky real-time lighting and army of nightmarish creatures from beyond the afterlife...

"Firstly, they're pretty clever at finding their way to you – they can spot you not just by sight and sound, but also by smell, then once they've

got a bead on you they'll break through or go around most barriers in their path," continues Polloni. "They won't always come straight for you – they might have their sights set on mauling someone else, and it can be particularly disconcerting when one of them comes out of nowhere and flies straight past you making you think yourself lucky it didn't have your name on it."

*AITD* will also feature human characters, but it'll be ambivalent as to whether they're actually good or bad. They may only be scared stiff and just want to survive, but you will often have to make a choice of whether to kill them or not, a decision that will ultimately influence which of the game's multiple endings you'll see.

"We put the inventory in real time in Carnby's jacket, and with a quick key press, a simple interface lets you choose and combine objects easily," adds Polloni. "There's also a system that lets you assign favourite combinations as presets which you trigger directly and quickly from keys – useful when you're under attack. We think players will soon find combinations they like and use them repeatedly throughout the game."

However, the most dynamic aspect of *Alone In The Dark* has to be the unscripted fire, which has taken the most work to implement. Everything in the game world – apart from the rain-doused trees – can burn, allowing you to prepare fire traps with lighter fluid, block off doorways from monsters with burning debris, light improvised chair-leg torches or just set foes ablaze, although you have to be careful not to let infernos get out of control.

"Fire can also become your worst enemy," warns Polloni. "There's nothing more terrifying than being trapped in a burning room with the ceiling falling around you and no visible means of escape."

We still have concerns over the console-heavy control system and whether it'll transfer smoothly to the mouse/keyboard PC set-up, but overall we're quite optimistic about *Alone In The Dark*, which along with *Dead Space* (page 54), means that 2008 could be quite a year for the third-person shit-you-up. Yep, any game that allows you to use rodents as improvised incendiary devices gets a thumbs up from us.

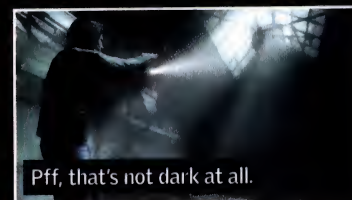


Playing with fire – always a laugh.

### FLAMING RATS

In this regard, the combat system is one of the bravest development aspects of the game, with your character's ability to pick up and manipulate hundreds of objects in the environment.

So you can take a fluorescent light from the ceiling and use it as a makeshift torch until the electricity cable detaches, swing a chair around your head as a weapon, or combine sticky tape and flares to allow you to stick them to walls, or even rats, to illuminate hidden enemies.



Pff, that's not dark at all.



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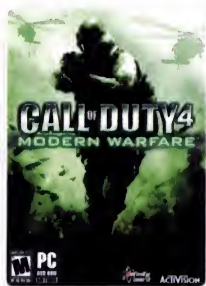
**A**RE YOU SUFFERING from chugginitis? Do you have to put the kettle on, make the dinner and take the dog for a walk before *Windows* boots up? Would you get a more accurate representation of *Crysis* if you ordered your simple uncle to take photos of the game from your PC and run them quickly using his '70s slide projector? Then you need help – and a brand new state-of-the-art gaming PC from the nice folks at Packard Bell.

The iPower 8610 is a blindingly fast machine, powered with an Intel Core 2 Quad, 2GB of RAM and a 256MB NVIDIA GeForce 8600GTS – everything you need for liquid smooth frame rates. Not only that, but we know that you also like to sit down too – are we correct? Of course! Which is why we're also giving away a GameRacer Pro Driving Simulator (basically a posh gaming chair) so you can relax in comfort when blasting aliens or murdering terrorists. Plus, we're also stuffing copies of *Race 07* and *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* in there too, just because we can. So, how do you win this ridiculously opulent package of PC goodness? Simple – just answer the question below...

**Q** What is the name of the *Monty Python* theme tune by Sousa?

- A) The Packard Bell March**
- B) The Alexander Graham Bell March**
- C) The Liberty Bell March**

To enter simply send a text message to 84383. Start your message PCZBELL, then a space, then enter A, B, or C, then a space, then your name and email address. Texts cost £1 and you can enter as many times as you like. Competition ends 27 February 2008, and any entries received after this date will be laughed at. Standard competition and texting rules apply – see page 9. If you don't want to receive details of further offers and promotions from Future Publishing or other companies that may or may not include pornographers and marketing scumbags, then please put the word NO at the end of your message. If you insist on ignoring the modern world then you can enter by post by sending a postcard to PC ZONE Packard Bell compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Entrants must be 18 or over.



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**TOTALLY TROPICAL TASTE...**

# JUST CAUSE 2

**ETA  
Q3  
2008**

*Jamie Sefton on the 10 reasons why you should give a grappling hook about this sun-baked sequel*

DEVELOPER Avalanche Studios PUBLISHER Eidos WEBSITE [www.eidosinteractive.co.uk](http://www.eidosinteractive.co.uk)

**I**T'S OFFICIAL: TROPICAL islands are the latest must-have environmental accessory this season for over-the-shoulder, free-roaming third-person carnage. *Just Cause 2* is the sequel to the enjoyable first *GTA*-inspired game, that saw Latino action hero Rico Rodriguez causing mayhem on a South American island, and is part of a trend that is seeing the tropical paradise setting in everything from the seminal *Far Cry*, through *Crysis*, *Dead Island* and *Lost: The Video Game*.

However, as well as moving to a new fictional island, *Just Cause 2* brings a ton of new weapons, vehicles, missions and special moves to the beach party, plus major improvements to Rico's OTT gizmos. We can't confirm the appearance of another whorehouse in a volcano (yes, *Just Cause* had one), but we reckon there are still 10 excellent reasons why Avalanche Studios' newest is worth getting all tingly about...



## THE LOWDOWN

Sequel to the decent *GTA*-inspired action game



Set in over 1,000km<sup>2</sup> of tropical paradise



New grappling hook and parachute features



Over 100 vehicles and tons of weaponry



Could this be *Crysis*-lite?



## 01 HIT ME BABY

*Just Cause 2*'s new setting is the tropical South East Asian island of Panau – over 1,000km<sup>2</sup> of open environments including forests, snow-capped mountains and desert – which is ruled over by the dictator Baby Panay. Your mission is to bring home missing agent Tom Sheldon – Rico's former commander – who has gone AWOL and evil by teaming up with Baby Panay. And while carrying out this rendition, Rico must cause chaos on the island by making sure Panau's three gangs (the Reapers, the Roaches and the Ular Boys) turn on each other.



## 02 GWAPPLE ME GWAPENUTS

Rico's grappling hook, that allowed him to latch on to vehicles, as well as use in conjunction with his parachute to fly around the island, has been 'enhanced'. Avalanche have yet to reveal exactly what 'enhanced' means, but we reckon that with the addition of Havok Physics (as used in just about every other action game, ever), you'll be able to do some damage to collapsible objects, and also use the hook to access areas that were previously unreachable.

## 03 SO 'CHUTE ME

*Just Cause 2*'s other major gimmick is Rico's instantly-deployable steerable parachute, which as described above, allows you to parasail from moving vehicles. However, in *JC2* the 'chute is now much more manoeuvrable, so you can now, for example, Base jump from the new ridiculously-tall

skyscrapers, access high security locations from the sky, and rain down grenades from above.

## 04 BLOW SHIT UP

While we were not talking *Crysis* levels of graphics realism and environmental detail, *JC2* still manages to pump out a serious amount of in-your-face OTT ultra-violence. We're talking Havok Physics, progressive damage of vehicles and objects and massive, eyelash-searing balls of flame that send vehicles, debris and ragdoll bodies spinning helplessly into the air.

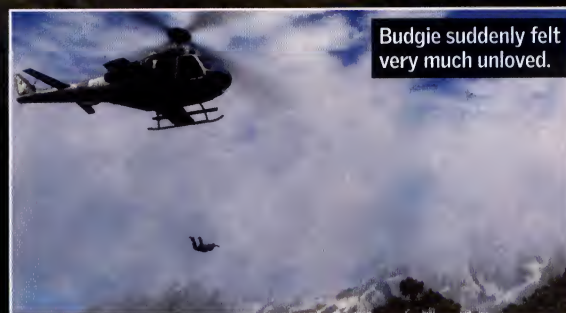
## 05 BULLET TIME

Rico has access to dozens of weapons, including rocket launchers, grenades, shotguns, dual-handed pistols and that massive chain-gun from *Predator* that mows down enemies with gay abandon. You can also use mounted guns on vehicles, such as a lethal attack





Bloody traffic-light windshield cleaners.



Budgie suddenly felt very much unloved.

## Rico must cause chaos on Panau by making sure the island's three big gangs turn on each other

helicopter, and even upgrade your weapons in the black market for better accuracy and a bigger bang for your illegal buck.

### 06 DRIVE-BY SHOOTING

As with *Just Cause*, you can drive over 100 land, sea and air vehicles such as jeeps, jet planes, tuk tuks, helicopters, 4x4s and catamarans, each with tweaked handling. An added neat feature is the ability to jump between multiple positions on a fast-moving vehicle to allow you to find the best cover while firing bullets into nasty men's faces. Now that's just damn cool.

### 07 FREEDOM FIGHTING

Avalanche Studios are ditching the often-tedious side missions from the original *Just Cause* and concentrating the action on the single-player story arc structure. However, you can complete missions in any order and in any way you like, or just go off and either explore the enormous tropical paradise in an extreme sports style, or destroy everything in sight.

### 08 KILLING FIELDS

Mouse control will make aiming easier than on our console country cousins, but you'll be assisted by a subtle auto targeting system to keep the third-person action fast-paced and rewarding. The enemies will have flashy new AI to enable them to react intelligently to whatever's thrown at them, for what the developers hope will be complex, emergent gameplay.

### 09 BACKROOM BOYS

Rico Rodriguez works for the Agency, which is always plugging away in the background, and available at the touch of a button through your handy PDA for reconnaissance, vehicle drops, mission info, extractions, and Dairylea sandwiches with the crusts cut off.

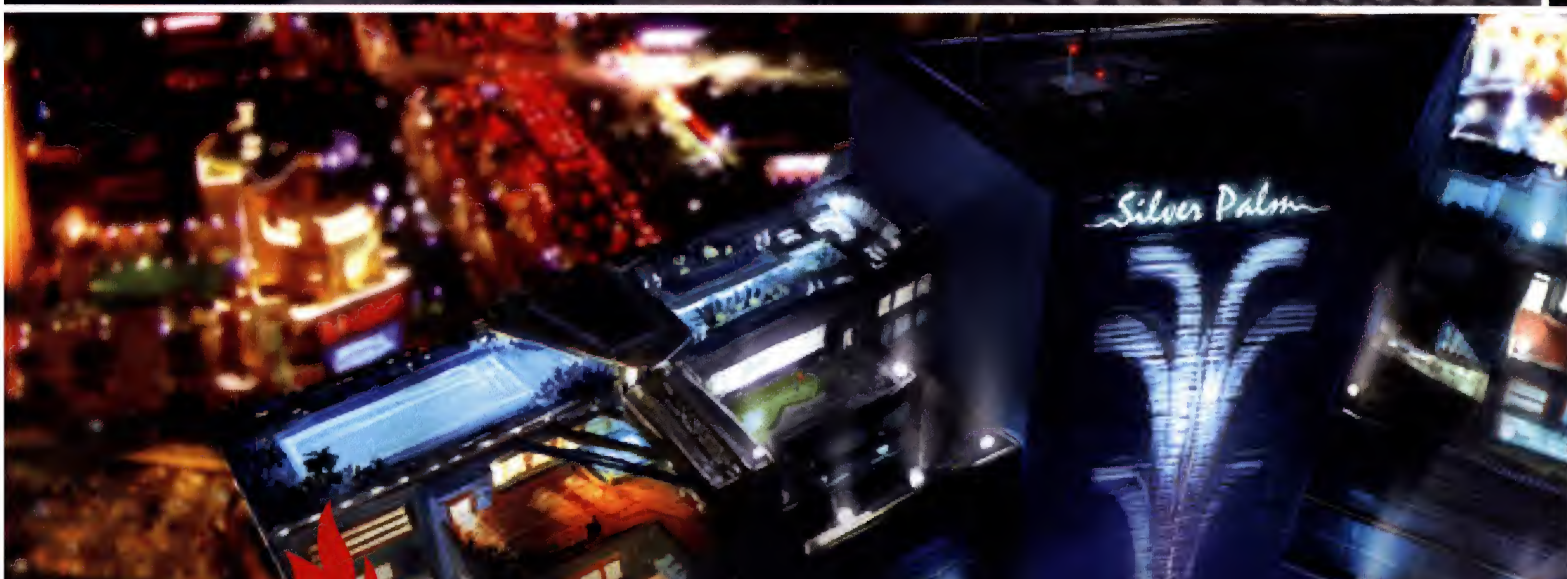
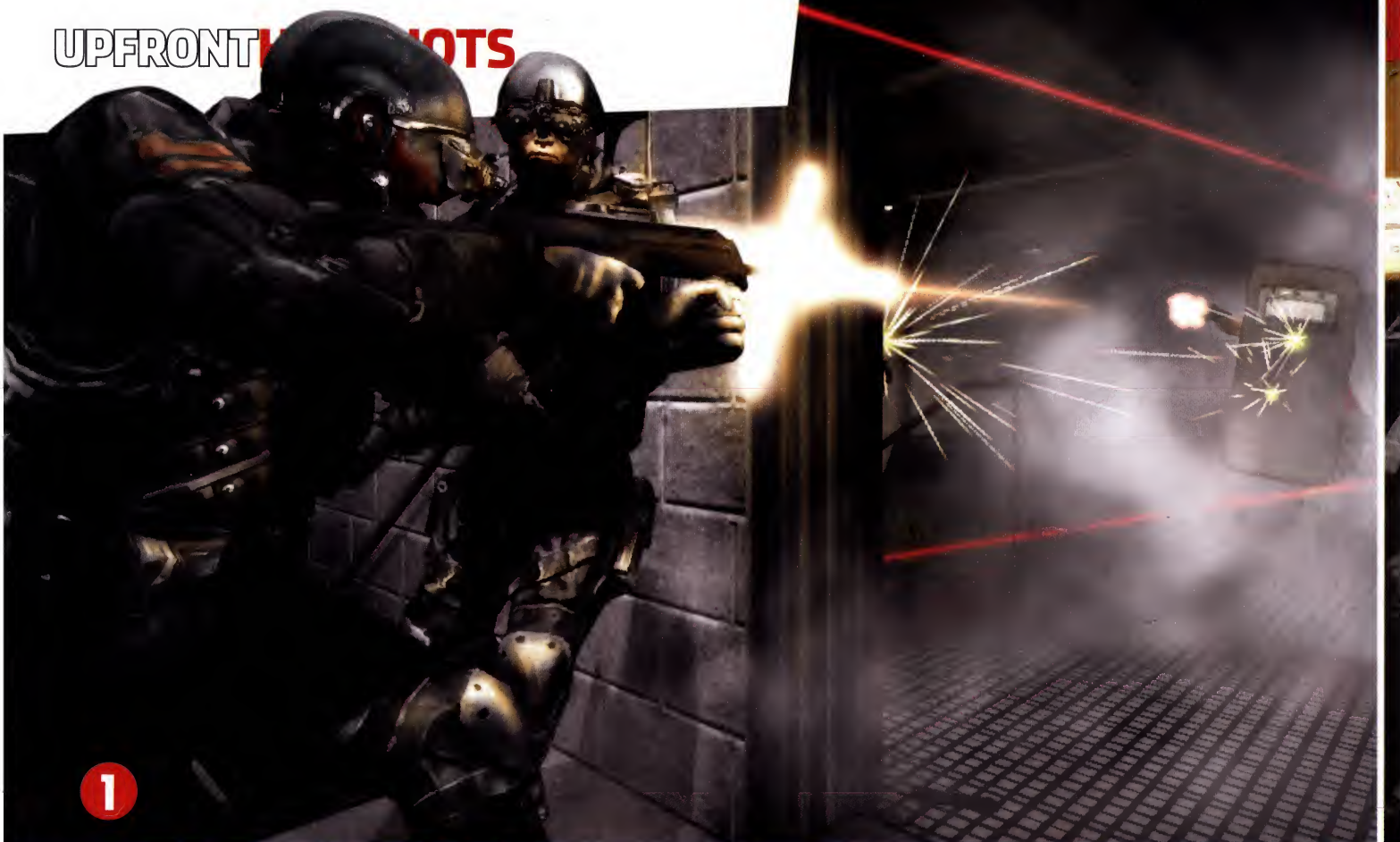
### 10 CHAOS ENGINE

*Just Cause 2* rewards chaos: the more mayhem you create through finishing missions, having different faction alliances and destroying stuff, the more locations and employers will be revealed for Rico to increase his strategic influence. Just watch out for polar bears and wisps of smoke... **PC7**



Suicide isn't painless, but it can be scenic.



**HOT  
SHOTS**

# RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEB [rainbowsixgame.uk.ubi.com](http://rainbowsixgame.uk.ubi.com) ETA March 2008

**I**F THERE'S ONE thing that ruins a friendly trip to Sin City it's the threat of terrorism, and Tom Clancy is back to further inconvenience any and all gambling excursions. Taking the glitz of America's vice-vista once again and having you play in parallel with the first *Vegas*' Leonard Keller, as top-gun shooter Commander Bishop. The game brings the formerly online-only experience system into the single-player, allowing you to unlock new equipment as you go, and lets you pinpoint and take out the terrorist leaders, bringing down spawn points and allowing more tactical advancement throughout levels. *R6: Las Vegas 2* is looking remarkably fresh and clean, and is indeed a worthy sixth game for the *Rainbow Six* series.





## The bigger picture

### 1 BOOM BANG-A-BANG

Terrorists have got clever with their cover, gaining the ability to put up ballistic shields, and react intelligently to gunfire instead of running into your bullets.

### 2 JOINY VEGAS

Two heroes can take on terror together with full support for co-op in single player. Players can also jump into each other's co-op experience, à la *Gears of War*.

### 3 WHAT HAPPENED IN VEGAS...

Three maps from *Rainbow Six: Vegas's* multiplayer mode make a return, along with 10 new ones created for the sequel, playable in all multiplayer and co-op modes.

### 4 RAMBLIN' AND GAMBLIN'

Your AI compatriots also act more intelligently, using the new leapfrogging technique to cover you as you move into a new area.

### 5 GO TEAM VEGAS

Players can now team up to hunt down those who wish to take our freedom in the Terrorist Hunt mode, seeking out and eliminating the threat of a group of AI wrongdoers outside of the main campaign.

### 6 BOMB CLANCY

There's a new multiplayer mode in the form of Demolition, in which you must plant and protect an explosive charge until it's about to go off, then haul all asses out of there before you get charred.

### 7 CITY SLICKERS

While a great deal of the content will take place in Las Vegas, the storyline will also take you into new locales on the outskirts of the city as you put a stop to nasty-man Alvarez Cabrero and, no doubt, his plans to cause chaos.



6





# WINNER PC GAME OF THE YEAR

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# Opening The Orange Box

Team  
Fortress 2 Portal  
HL2:EP2



**We go behind the scenes of Valve's masterpiece...**

**I**N A WINTER packed with big-name shooter releases there was never really any doubt who'd win out. In value, pedigree and sheer gameplay magic *The Orange Box* delivered on every count: *TF2* is the funniest multiplayer experience many have ever experienced, *Portal* is so self-consciously kooky that it has now infected every corner of the internet, and *Episode Two* continued the *Half-Life* saga with remarkable aplomb. And as for that sucker punch ending, well we didn't see that one coming, even if our new editor won't stop pointing out he did see it coming way back in issue 167.

Still, whether it's that constant sad look in a Hunter's eyes, the insane and frankly hilarious climax to *Portal* or that glorious feeling of trying to look nonchalant as a spy in a room full of enemy snipers: it brought more magic moments to your Steam account than the equivalent power of five whole tins of Quality Street. As a magazine we've been able to poke our heads under the door of Valve HQ (and steal their crisps) at a few stages of orange development – so it seemed natural to get them to spill on how three games of such high stature came about. So sit back and relax as we take you on an *Orange Box* trivia thrill-ride.





Strider-bustin'

# Half-Life 2: Episode Two

Valve's David Speyrer and Marc Laidlaw reveal the secrets of *Half-Life 2's* second episode to *Jamie Sefton*: why you can't lose Alyx, the tear-jerking ending and their plans for *Episode Three*

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve/EA WEBSITE [www.half-life2.com](http://www.half-life2.com)



**W**HILE THE LONG delay of the game's release stretched the idea of what episodic gaming actually is, *Half-Life 2: Episode Two* remains a triumphant expansion to the universe, taking your character of Gordon Freeman and his sassy sidekick Alyx on an epic trek to the White Forest resistance base.

On an eventful journey, Alyx is attacked and left unconscious by a new deadly opponent – a Hunter – Gordon discovers a complex underground Antlion cave system with the Vortigaunts, and the battle for Earth is taken out into the open with the help of a new super-powered muscle car and a helping of lethal Strider Busters. The man in charge of bringing *Episode Two*

to your hard drive was project lead David Speyrer, who joined Valve just as work on *Half-Life 2* started back in 1998. Speyrer began our interview by explaining how the development team always examined scenes carefully in *Ep2* through playtesting, and ruthlessly cut anything that confused the player – even if it meant changing ideas already revealed to the gaming public...

"If you remember watching the trailer that we did for *Episode Two*, there was a bit where Alyx was dangling over the deep canyon. There were a lot of issues with that sequence, the worst being that Alyx falling as a result of the train crash didn't create any interesting tension between the player and the Hunters as an adversary. Testers mashed the use key to try and figure out how to catch her before she falls, and then they go down there, see

**WARNING! SPOILERS!**

Dirty sod...





We know what you're thinking. But this is a family magazine.

## Opening The Orange Box



Concept art for the first Advisor confrontation.

her unconscious and really want to help her, but there was nothing they could do but wait for the Vortigaunt. We don't have an administer first aid button!"

Speyrer felt that the sequence they eventually created with the Hunter was infinitely more effective, as the player knew very clearly that Gordon was trapped and immobile, and simply had to watch helplessly as the enemy punctured poor Alyx.

### CAVE STORY

The difference between a good and a truly great game is in the polishing, and *Episode Two* had numerous balancing issues throughout its development. For example, in the level where you're being chased by the Antlion Guardian, Speyrer found that finding the right balance of being just challenging enough was very difficult, and took months of work to get it right.

"The original version was a lot more maze-like and players would just get incredibly lost. So, we did a pass of adding unique landmarks so that the player would know if they ended up at the same intersection twice, and then we then tilted the whole map so that you'd know down was one way and

up was the other – but still it wasn't enough. We then lopped off a couple of loops to simplify the geometry and added the drop-downs, which kind of force forward progression, because you can't get back up them. I also think reworking the lighting and making the little crawl tubes high-contrast really helped, as it led people into them."

At this point we were joined by the game's writer Marc Laidlaw, who as well as being the franchise's scribe, has also written many short stories and books, including *Neon Lotus*, which was nominated for a Philip K. Dick Award. One of the burning questions we needed answering was why the team felt they needed to bring in a new character, Dr Arne Magnusson?

"In early drafts of the episode, Eli and Kleiner had warmed up White Forest all by themselves, somehow, in the brief time after fleeing City 17. This seemed ridiculous, so we developed a backstory in which Black Mesa had acquired an extremely cheap Cold War bunker and developed some projects in response to budgetary and oversight problems associated with basing all work in North America.

"Again, all the explanatory matter bogged down the game, so we ditched

## The player knew that Gordon was trapped, and had to watch helplessly as the enemy punctured Alyx

it. There may still be some old lines hanging around in the .wav files, but I haven't looked..."

### ME AND MY GIRL

Later in *Episode Two*, when Gordon finally gets behind the wheel of the Hotrod, Alyx suddenly starts jumping in the car next to you, creating a problem for the game designer: what happens if you drive off without her?



Welding: harder than it looks.



"You're safe now, back in good old Vortigaunt 1955."



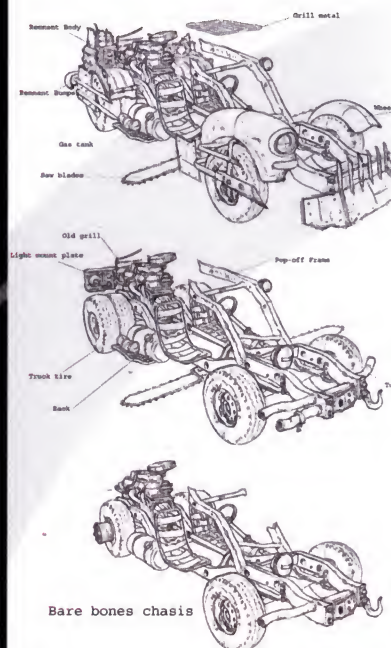
Sir Patrick Moore is in talks for the cinematic adaptation.



There's tons of vertical stuff in *Ep2*. It's all about the 'up'.

"Winnie the Pooh on line one."

The dreaded Hunter: Bryan Ferry's son is said to be a fan.



## Rocket Gnome

Inconsequential questions fired at *Episode Two*'s writer Marc Laidlaw...



**Q** This is the second time we've launched a rocket to save the world in *Half-Life* – is there a link between the rocket launched in the original game and this one?

**A** We had a sequence in *Ep2* where it was explained that yes, this module you were launching was specifically going to tap into the old portal satellite array that you completed by launching the rocket at Black Mesa. It was too much talking so it got cut.

**What's happened to Lamarr? You sent him into space! Me?**

**Speaking of which, carrying the gnome through the game added a certain poignancy to the emotional scenes – where'd that achievement idea come from?**

One of our artists and modellers, Matt Wright, championed the gnome. It is quite moving to see the gnome looking tenderly at comatose Alyx.

**The final scene is emotionally charged and extremely well delivered – the fade to black, combined with the very final line, almost brings a tear to the eye...**

Sorry to hear that qualifying "almost." Quite a few fans wrote to say we broke the blubbing barrier. They wept.

"It really depends on the situation," explains Speyrer.

"If she's close enough she'll run after you and jump in to catch up. In the worst-case scenario, where we realise the player is being malicious and trying to break the game, we bring her ahead at the transitions. Also if you accidentally leave Alyx behind, and complete the whole map, we feel it would be an undue punishment to have to go back for her, and in that case we bring her forward to join you too. It's always a trade off, and we consider it a failure of the game if the player gets into a situation where they can't proceed. We try to make the guarantee that auto saves only are sufficient to play the game."

For the climactic level, Speyrer discovered that this gameplay freedom was challenging to build because they needed to provide for players, whatever tactics they chose. "Some players would use the car exclusively, while others would fall back to the base, and do the whole fight there or even complete the whole level on foot. We originally required a lot of use of the Combine Assault Rifle's alt-fire as the primary way to dispatch the Hunters, but we found a large population of playtesters didn't know about it and didn't use it."

The sheer size of the final map was also a major problem for the *Ep2* team, as players could get disorientated.

"We used the radar on the car, the loudspeaker announcements – where the guy tells you where the Striders and Hunters are coming from – and created

these key visual landmarks, such as the saw mill. I was very happy with the final battle – we wanted people to feel that they barely snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, with the last wave pushing players right up against the ropes so that they were taking out the final Striders right as they marched up to the base. We didn't want it to be too difficult, though, and really didn't want players to be frustrated."

## DIRTY LAUNDRY

So, how did the final scene become such an emotionally-charged moment? Marc Laidlaw: "I wrote as good a script as I could, then when we got into the recording studio, Merle Dandridge [Alyx Vance's voice] took the scene further than was possible on paper. The most powerful bit at the end was her improvisation; I just transcribed it. When we had that, the animator went to work with a level designer, blocking out the movements of the actors in the scene, then slowly getting into the details. Merle's raw performance could make people choke up – but it only came together at the very end, which always seems to happen..."

And finally – what can we expect in *Episode Three*? "We don't know entirely what's happening in the next episode, but we're gonna figure it out!" laughed Speyrer. "There are always things we want to do that we can't because of the constraints of either the story or the arc we've laid out for the gameplay – or just time. So we shelve them and carry on. Ideas fly around here quite a bit, so

Eat countryside, alien filth.



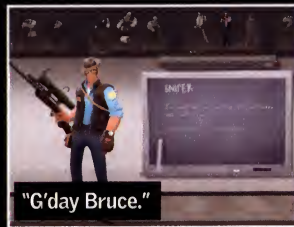


David Shields  
David Byrne

# Opening The Orange Box

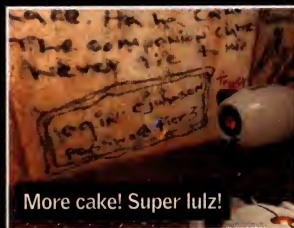
## TF2 taunts

The classes of *Team Fortress 2* have a huge array of rare phrases and taunts, the Scout's "I broke your stupid crap, moron!" being a favourite of lead developer Robin Walker. They're context-sensitive, meaning some are extremely hard to come across. Even the Pyro, whose voice resembles the muffled garblings of *South Park*'s Kenny, has a hefty number of lines. The Sniper is odd, spouting English phrases like "Ya pikneys" and "Blow the inside of your head all over four counties" in an Aussie accent.



# No answers

In *Portal*'s Test Chamber 17, in one of the game's many behind-the-scenes hidey-holes, you can find the login (cjohanson) and password (tier3) of Aperture Science's CEO Cave Johnson. Use this at [aperturescience.com](http://aperturescience.com) and run 'notes' to see a brief timeline of the company. You can also run 'apply' to go through an Enrichment Centre application process (your answers to which are recorded by Valve). Enter 'thecakeisalie' for a hidden message from an employee, along with a video feed of the relaxation vault.



**WATER DEFENCE**  
Aperture Science  
Laboratories founded,  
specialises in shower  
curtains.

1953

## DISAPPEARING VESSELS

GLADOS reaches basic functionality. Aperture Science's research ship, the Borealis, vanishes, along with part of a dry dock – presumably an on-board portal experiment had gone very wrong. Or very right.

1996

## BLOODY BLACK MESA

**BLOODY BLACK MESA**  
Resonance cascade at Black Mesa, portals created between Earth and Xen. Gordon Freeman enters stasis.

**HALF-LIFE**

2000

**SHE'S ALIVE**

GLaDOS's 'Genetic Lifeform AI' activated. Aperture Science staff are quarantined.

2002

## PORTAL

## BLOODY IMMIGRANTS

Portals storm across Earth.  
Xen aliens swarm through,  
with antlions and stuff.  
Fortified cities are created.

2004

**WE CAVE LIKE THE FRENCH**

The Combine invade Earth in the Seven Hour War. Earth surrenders, Wallace Breen acts as liaison between humans and the Combine.

2010

## HOORAY FOR THE FREEMAN

Gordon Freeman leads a rebel  
against the Combine, the Citadel  
is destroyed. The Portal to Xen  
is closed. Borealis is found.

**HALF-  
LIFE 2**

2020



This was a triumph...

# Portal

Who would have believed that a 3D puzzle game voiced by a psychopathic female AI would become one of the games of 2007? Designer Kim Swift gives *Jamie Sefton* the hole truth...

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve/EA WEBSITE [www.halflife2.com](http://www.halflife2.com)

**T**HE GAMES WORLD has gone bat shit over *Portal*. By the time you read this, there will be around 23,456 more blogs about the Weighted Companion Cube and over 1.2 million references on forums about "cake", beating the previous record set by "the knights who say 'Ni'" by 67 per cent.

Despite Valve's sci-fi spatial puzzler clocking in at less than three hours, *Portal* has become a phenomenon, built on a fantastic game idea, a teasing *Half-Life* universe setting, memorable characters, and the funniest writing and best-performed dialogue this side of *Psychonauts*.

"I think the main reason people like the game is that it's just got a great personality," says designer Kim Swift. "When you hand people a lot of story, it makes people lazy, it's all there for you, and you don't have to discover anything: you're basically creating apathy. Sometimes it's best to be a little bit vague with your story, and people can have all sorts of fun filling in the gaps that you've left for them."

## STUDENT GRANT

*Portal* began life as *Narbacular Drop*, a portal-based game created by Kim and a group of friends at the DigiPen Institute of Technology in Redmond,

Washington. Through that experience, the team learned a lot about what makes an interesting and enjoyable title.

"One of the reasons we kept *Portal* as simple as *Narbacular Drop*, is that we found out that the more complications you add to a game, the more you're increasing the chances that you're going to do something stupid. We'd be trying to do a lot of different stuff, rather than focusing on one concept. We found that having a simple game design allows you to spend your time polishing that idea."

Valve saw *Narbacular Drop* and were immediately impressed by the *Portal* concept, snapping up the talented graduates and teaming them up with the *Half-Life* crew in the hope of creating something unique to add to Gordon Freeman's universe. "We're all big *HL* fans, so why not! We met up with Marc Laidlaw, the lead writer on the *HL* games, and just made sure that everything fitted in OK. We talked to the other *Episode* teams, to see how we can get the games to fit together – so in *Episode Two*, there's a mention of the Aperture Science facility."

## DIGITAL LOVE

The star of *Portal* is GLaDOS, the mixed-up psychopathic female AI boss of the testing facility – but how did



The original design for GLaDOS.







## Opening The Orange Box



The internet may have bled the game dry, but we still love *Portal*.

The monitoring station, before being reduced to a simple red telephone.



Burn those personality spheres!



the idea of this quirky, robot enemy happen?

"We eventually had a game that was fun and interesting to play, but was just very dry," continues Kim. "So we talked to Eric Wolpaw, who does our writing, and he was able to bring a lot of personality to the table."

"We tried a few different timings of when she should start to go batty, and we basically came up with that particular evolution of her personality. You know you've succeeded when someone completes a puzzle, smiles, then completely stops what they're doing to listen to GLaDOS talk, laugh, then get into the elevator."

Another major... er... personality in *Portal* is the Weighted Companion Cube, but apparently the cuddly cuboid never had any voice of its own.

"We tossed the idea around a little bit, but nah. There's something amusing about imbuing this completely inanimate object with a personality that isn't there, but everyone is impressing

upon it these qualities – that it's your best friend, it's wonderful."

### HUGE SUCCESS

*Portal* required major playtesting to ensure the balance of gameplay, character and storyline to get it just right, using hardcore *Counter-Strike* fans, people's wives and partners, and even Gabe Newell's children.

"I guess we just wanted to see how many kinds of people we could get to have fun," adds Kim. "If people are laughing, we've done our job. If they're ripping off their headphones and looking at us in disgust, then we need to make some adjustments. A lot of our dialogue and narrative came from inside jokes, and if other people enjoyed it too, it stayed in the game. I miss the days of point and click adventure games where they were just funny, a laugh riot..."

Before we leave Kim to begin planning her next secret project, we wondered what she and the rest of the *Portal* development team felt like, knowing that millions of *Portal* fans are now quoting lines of dialogue to anyone who will listen?

"It's horrible! Why would I like people enjoying my game that I put my blood, sweat and tears into for two years?" **PC7**



Aperture Science's handy info-screens.



**MAGGOTS!**

# Team Fortress 2

An all-star cast, an all-action shooter, and an amazing game – lead developer Robin Walker talks *Steve Hogarty* through the rise of *Team Fortress 2*

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve/EA WEBSITE [www.teamfortress.com](http://www.teamfortress.com)

**V**ALVE'S DEVOTION TO its customers, their unheard of desire to ensure that at every turn we are inescapably pleased with their product, is no more noticeable than with *Team Fortress 2*. Like doting mothers, they've been keeping tabs on how we play. Vast mountains of data stored in underground bunkers keep records of our every action – that time you were sniped on top of the bridge in 2fort? It's in there. And all in the name of improving the thing more and more.

"Most of the time the stats tend to confirm things we already know," explains Robin Walker, lead developer on *Team Fortress 2*, "but there are cases where our assumptions are incorrect, like players using one area more than another. Or the areas that are most lethal. We're trying to find flow, where players are dying, where players spend

most of their time, and where the areas of contention are. It helps us understand the areas that have the most traffic, and where we should be a little more careful with performance. We need to make sure that the areas where most of the combat's happening is where we hold back on the amount of detail, so that we can leave as much of the frame rate free for the combat."

Valve recently released many of these stats, purely as a point of interest for the players. Deathmaps showed hotspots – areas in which more people were dying – while other stats revealed which classes were more popular. Oddly, on certain supposedly symmetrical maps the Blue team seemed to be victorious more often...

"We're not sure about that one yet," offers Walker. "The tricky thing about stats is that you need to make sure they're 100 per cent foolproof before you run off and start changing the game. There are actually a couple of bugs in those stats that we know of already and that we're going to fix. The weighting towards the Blue team is really interesting – you could theorise that it's down to Blue being the first team on the selection screen, so on average more people are selecting Blue,



2fort's deathmap.



Blues – more likely to win, oddly enough.

The Heavy concept art.

DA  
**H.W.  
GUY**





Spies and Engineers – the snakes and mongooses of TF2.



## Opening The Orange Box

### Oddly, on certain symmetrical maps the Blue team seemed to be victorious more often...

meaning that the Blue team has slightly more players on it than the Red team. We really want to dig into the stats a lot more and see that they're correct before we start tuning. Obviously if it's something that's just a result of human nature then maybe we shouldn't be tuning it at all – it's a tricky balance."

#### MATCH UP

With this almost inexhaustible supply of information pertaining to how good we are at the game, the classes we enjoy playing and the people we enjoy playing with, why haven't we seen the world's most astounding matchmaking system yet?

"We're working on matchmaking right now for *Left 4 Dead*," claims Walker, "and the plan is to roll that back into *Team Fortress 2* and all our other multiplayer products. We've no firm plans in terms of being able to say

what exact feature-set you'll get, but there's absolutely some matchmaking systems going in. In terms of more generalised matchmaking, not so much on the individual level, but on team and clan levels, that's something we'd really like to get into Steam at a basic level, so that it supports any product."

And as with any product, you can't just send a game out into the world and expect it to work either, you've got to pitch it into a minefield of trials, to face legions of testers not only hunting for bugs and ensuring the game's nine classes all balance correctly, but also making sure that the game is accessible to newbies and veterans alike.

"We're very interested in the understandability of everything," explains Walker. "We do a lot of testing with people who've never seen the product before, people who have shooter experience but not



The Pyro is the least-played class. Expect an achievement pack soon.



Team-Fort



**"I've always had a favourite in the Scout... you yell 'There goes all your stupid crap, morons!' I've always liked that one."**

Robin Walker gives us his favourite *TF2* one-liner

CAPTURE POINT →



The Scout can use his baseball bat to knock mines back into the Demoman's face.

*Team Fortress* experience, and others who may be daunted by online shooters. The goal is to find people who are least likely to understand the signals that the game's giving them, but may still want to buy the product if we do our job well. It's not a lot of use bringing in really advanced FPS players

who can understand a game at first glance no matter how bad a job we do explaining ourselves," continues Walker. "Over time we can start dropping in any player and they can understand what's going on, and we start transitioning more into testing with the more experienced playtesters, worrying more about balancing and finding exploits.

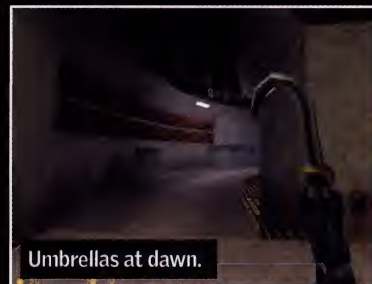
## Return of The Hunted

Classic *TFC* game mode set to make a triumphant recovery

Pressed on whether old *TFC* favourite 'The Hunted' would be showing up in *Team Fortress 2*, lead developer Robin Walker was pleased to bob his head and say "yes, sort of" over and over again until he had to be restrained. In this game mode, a VIP is chosen, and the teams split into bodyguards and assassins while the VIP attempts to reach a safe house.

"The Hunted was definitely our favourite game mode that we didn't do," smiles Walker, "and one of the main reasons we didn't do it early on was that there were problems stopping it from being successful in the public arena. It works great if you have a bunch of friends together, but it fell apart online. If you've got an rookie or, worse, a griefer, the whole game would fall apart.

"It was a classic case of not wanting to do it until we could do it right. We have a map at the moment that's kind of our retake on The Hunted. It keeps a lot of the gameplay, and yet doesn't have the problems that we had before. We're testing it now, and hopefully it'll be out soon. It'll also have some neat new gameplay features."



Umbrellas at dawn.



The traditional PC ZONE Fight Club group shot, just before they all go postal.

# Opening The Orange Box

PYRO



An earlier Pyro design, with a less cool gun.



"One of the things we really cared about with the experienced players was that their instincts about how a class should be played were somewhere in the ballpark of how the class actually works. We didn't want people coming in and saying, 'well this class is clearly intended to do this, so therefore I'll play like this,' and then fail because we thought it should be played differently.

Valve even go so far as to rent shelf space at a local games shop to see how their box art looks compared to the competition. And every playtester's PC is hooked up to a webcam, beaming the player's face right into Gabe Newell's office, where he probably sits nodding and taking notes on a clipboard.

"Sometimes playtesters aren't able to describe their emotion or their responses to things," explains Walker. "So instead we can see it when we look at their faces. We're a lot more interested in what the player does and how they react rather than what they tell us at the end of the playtest, because by that stage they've filtered it through their own thought processes."

## SOUND OFF

What's surprising is the sheer number of voice samples each class have to

hand. Not only is the game visually striking, but the quality and quantity of the sounds, their delivery timing, and the all-pervasive funniness with which they are infused, are pleasing to the ear.

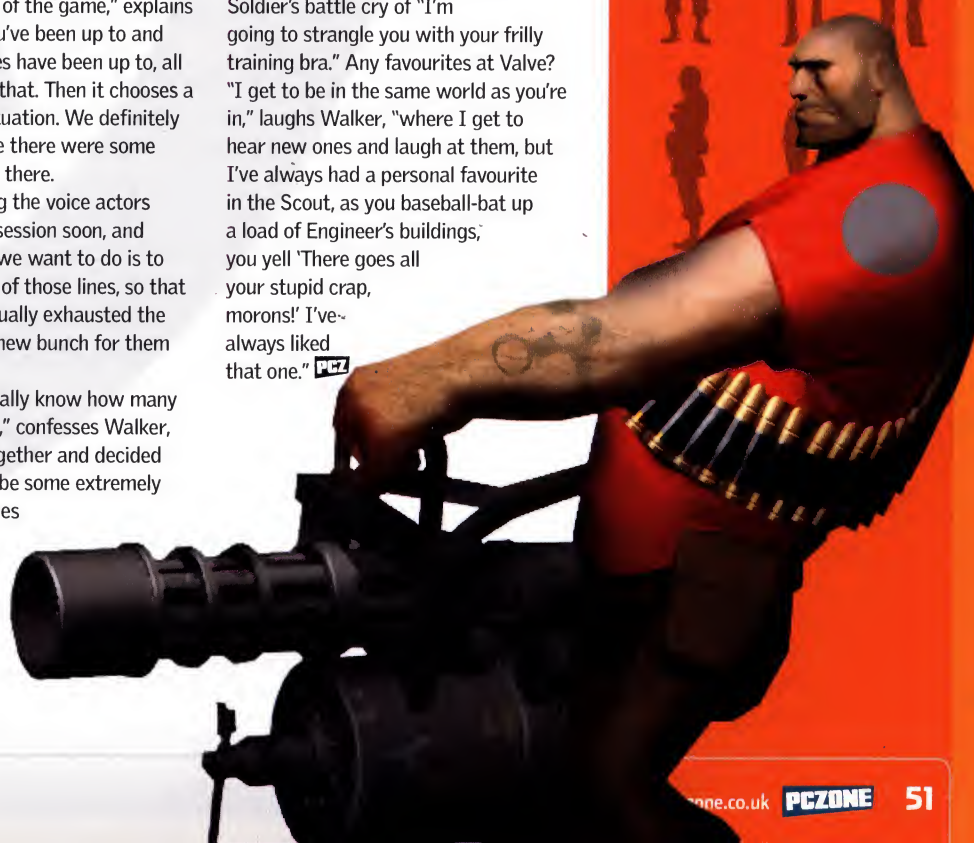
"When the character goes to speak it looks at the state of the game," explains Walker, "what you've been up to and what your enemies have been up to, all sorts of stuff like that. Then it chooses a line apt for the situation. We definitely tried to make sure there were some really rare ones in there.

"We're bringing the voice actors back for another session soon, and one of the things we want to do is to record even more of those lines, so that if people have actually exhausted the lines there'll be a new bunch for them to discover."

"I don't personally know how many samples there are," confesses Walker, "but we all got together and decided that there should be some extremely hard-to-trigger lines that would hang out there for months in the hope that people would have the exact

experience to make them happen. We wanted them to be playing in their third month and hear something they'd never heard before. It's a combination of player-performance and game-state."

We're particularly fond of the Soldier's battle cry of "I'm going to strangle you with your frilly training bra." Any favourites at Valve? "I get to be in the same world as you're in," laughs Walker, "where I get to hear new ones and laugh at them, but I've always had a personal favourite in the Scout, as you baseball-bat up a load of Engineer's buildings; you yell 'There goes all your stupid crap, morons! I've always liked that one.' PCZ



HL2:EP2 Portal Team Fortress 2



# Take your PC gaming to the next level

Windows Vista brings a whole host of next-generation features to the discerning PC gamer. Here are just a few that you need to know about



Windows Vista is the brand new version of Windows. Not only does it offer huge improvements in security, usability and appearance over Windows XP, but it's primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it.

It all revolves around DirectX 10, the new interface that games programmers are going to be using to push the boundaries of 3D games. DirectX 10 brings with it incredible new levels of detail and the ability to have more complex objects moving around in each scene. The result is stunning and offers a much more cinematic experience. Want to see what we're talking about? Just take a look at the in-game footage

of Crysis at [www.crysis-online.com](http://www.crysis-online.com). You'll be blown away.

There are other improvements, too. Windows Vista also introduces a new Games Explorer, which will make all your games accessible from a single location. And if you share your PC with your kids, you'll be happy to know that there are built-in parental controls to prevent them playing games unsuitable for their ages. Also, if you own an Xbox 360, it's good to know that its wireless controllers will work with Windows Vista as well.

So, if you want to stay current with your PC gaming, then Windows Vista is the way to go. Oh, and those massive improvements in PC security, usability and appearance? Don't worry, they're all thrown in for free.

## Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

Don't panic, there's every chance your PC will run Windows Vista without upgrades, especially if it's capable of playing the latest 3D games. But all PCs are not created equal, and to ensure that you get the best gaming experience, only PCs that are worthy can upgrade to Windows Vista.

It's easy to find out if your PC meets the requirements – simply download the free Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor from [www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready). Run it on your PC and you'll get the definitive verdict on whether your computer is up to running Windows Vista.

Windows Vista gives each PC a Windows Experience rating that tells you at a glance how powerful

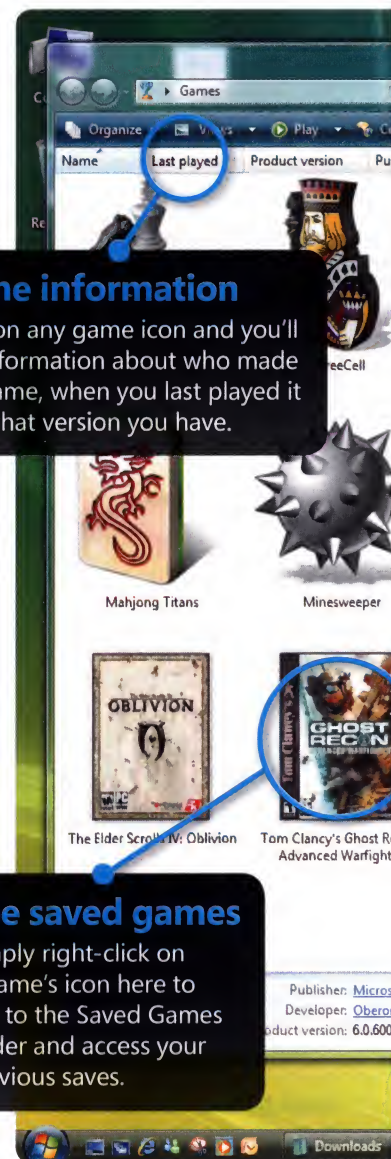
your processor, graphics card, memory and hard drive are, with a single combined score. The higher the number it comes up with, up to a current maximum of 5.9, the better your PC will be able to run Windows Vista and whatever games you want to play on it.



**RATE YOUR PC** Get an at-a-glance rating of how well your PC will run Windows Vista

### Game information

Click on any game icon and you'll see information about who made the game, when you last played it and what version you have.



### See saved games

Simply right-click on a game's icon here to get to the Saved Games folder and access your previous saves.

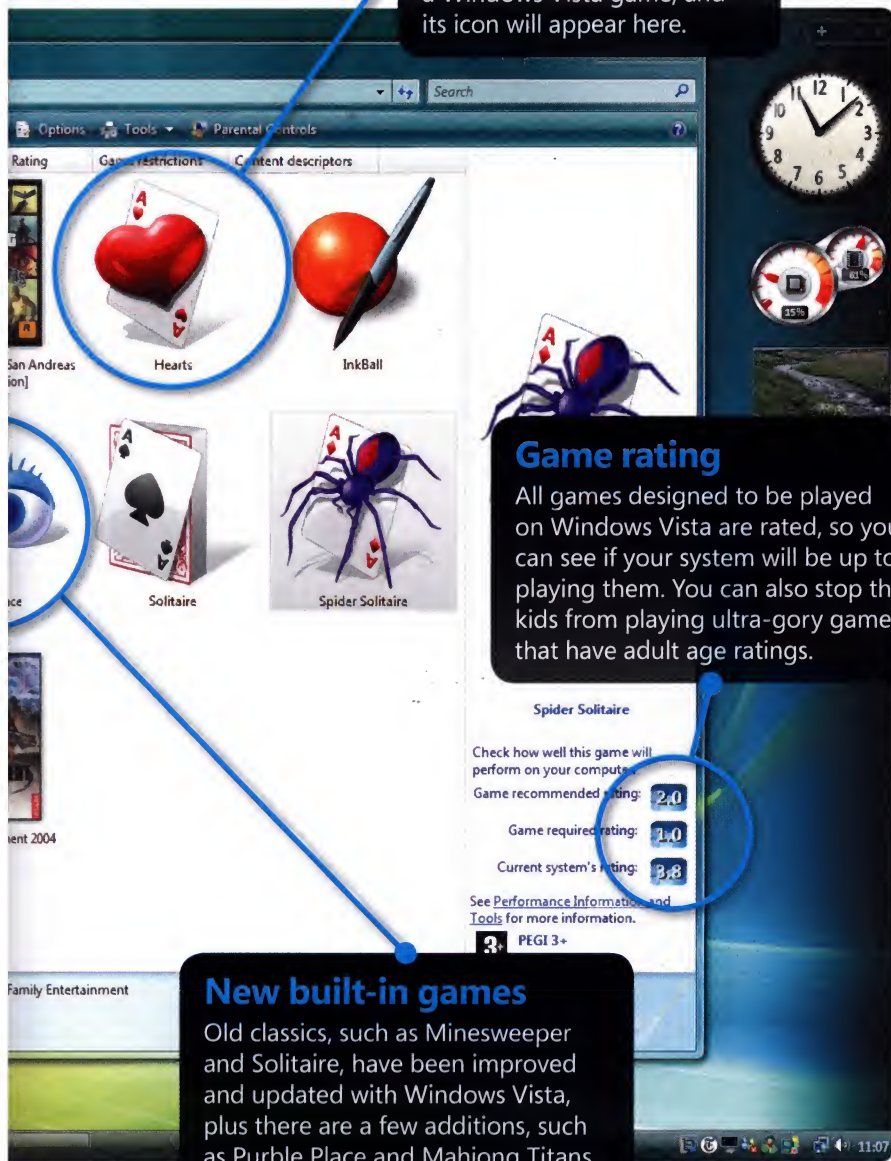
## Super Media Center

Windows Media Center is at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect up your PC to an HDTV and browse your music and video collection. What's more, you can bin your set-top DVD recorder! With Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play, record and timeshift TV programmes. Get hold of Windows Media Center Extender (a device that plugs into your TV) and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, this Extender capability is already built into it.



### All your games

All your games are now stored in one handy location. Install a Windows Vista game, and its icon will appear here.



### Game rating

All games designed to be played on Windows Vista are rated, so you can see if your system will be up to playing them. You can also stop the kids from playing ultra-gory games that have adult age ratings.

Spider Solitaire

Check how well this game will perform on your computer.

Game recommended ratings: 2.0

Game required ratings: 1.0

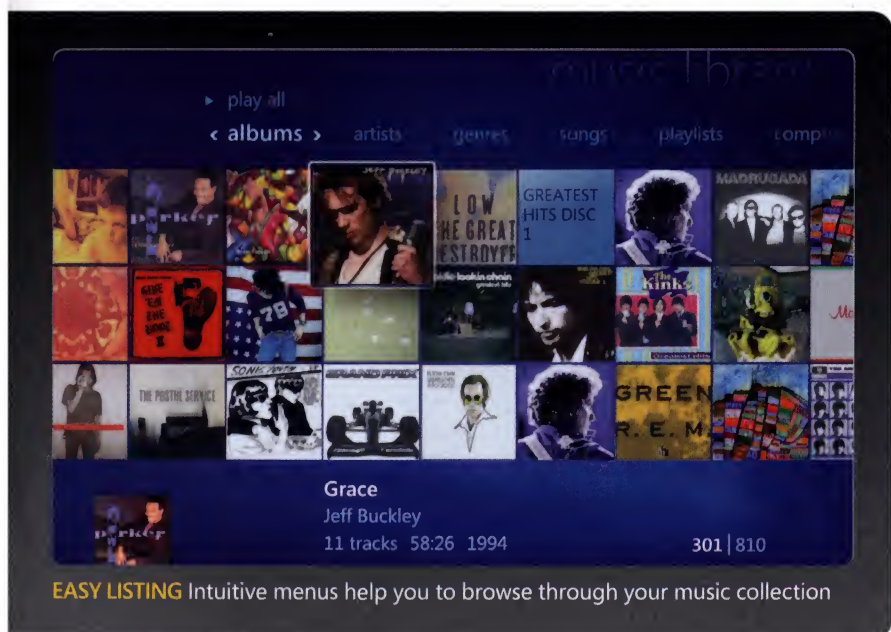
Current system's ratings: 3.8

See Performance Information and Tools for more information.

3+ PEGI 3+

### New built-in games

Old classics, such as Minesweeper and Solitaire, have been improved and updated with Windows Vista, plus there are a few additions, such as Purble Place and Mahjong Titans.



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Easily the best zero-g we've seen. Honestly.



Conveniently, for us, Isaac's spine is a health meter.

**COLD OUTSIDE.  
NO KIND OF ATMOSPHERE.**

ETA  
Q3  
2008

# DEAD SPACE

*Will Porter plays a game that accurately depicts the misery of being John Tracey on Thunderbird Five*

DEVELOPER EA Redwood Shores PUBLISHER EA [WEBSITE www.ea.com/deadspace](http://www.ea.com/deadspace)

## THE LOWDOWN

- Unsettling and gory survival horror ☒
- Slice-and-dice dismemberment ☒
- Intriguing zero-G sections ☒
- Happily copies from sci-fi masterpieces ☒
- But does it copy too much? ☒

**M**Y BRAIN IS rarely capable of absorbing new concepts, which is just as well since the field I work in is never more comfortable than when rehashing old ideas in ever shinier guises.

So you can imagine just how flooded with endorphins my recognition-neurons became when I had my first play of *Dead Space* – a blatant steal from more science-fiction staples and videogame masterclasses than can be physically comprehended.

EA have clearly been shamefully stealing furtive glances over the shoulders of their peers before furiously scribbling borrowed ideas into their code, but the end result is clever, engaging and wonderfully scary. So, are

you ready for an entire hands-on report based entirely on increasingly wavering comparisons? You are? Then let's go!

## DÉJÀ DEAD

*Dead Space* is a bit like *Event Horizon*, placing you on a ship, the USG Ishimura, that's currently floating dead in space, its crew apparently deceased and its engines offline. As for how it plays, well the initial touchstone here is *Resident Evil 4*, with its over-the-shoulder camera, that same inexorably slow turning circle as you bring a foe into your sights and some brilliantly unexpected scripted sequences when something grabs hold of your leg/neck/face and refuses to let go. It's the sort of game that has you clunking through darkened corridors searching for ammo in lockers before entering a decontamination chamber in which everything proceeds smoothly until the noises of pipes banging, steam hissing and strobed lighting begins to warn of something awry. Then, all of a sudden, you're surrounded by red, jagged, fleshy creations – half of which you can't make out as they scuttle over the opposite wall, and the other half are lurking behind a grille two feet behind you. I know we've been here before, but my how we love it.

*Dead Space* is also a bit like *Red Dwarf*. Its ship isn't a million miles away

from the Jupiter Mining Corporation's finest you see, a 'planetcracker' vessel that carves out city-sized lumps of rock from the surfaces of barren worlds and rips out the more profitable bits. Also, as in *Red Dwarf*, the protagonist isn't an Ace Rimmer space hero – he's an engineer (although presumably one ranked higher than third class and rarely called out to unblock chicken soup nozzles). Named Isaac Clarke, decked out in a clunky metal suit and armed only with engineering tools (that thankfully are generally of the 'slice and dice' mentality) he's very much alone – apart from, of course, the alien host and a mining crew thought dead but actually warped beyond all recognition. You see, much like in *Pitch Black*, the planet the Ishimura chose to munch upon wasn't as barren as it first appeared. Tired of the comparisons yet? Well sit tight, as we've barely begun.

## A BIT LIKE...

Our fifth comparison, as we move onto the extra-terrestrial cast members while avoiding the overwhelmingly obvious influence of *Aliens*, is *The Thing* – in both visuals and behaviour. You see, it's the fact that *Dead Space*'s Necromorphs are so unpredictable in their biology – so tentacle packed, so scuttly and so adept at crawling over ceilings – that



The game reeks of *Doom 3*. In a good way.



THE STORY SO FAR...

## DEAD SPACE

**MARKED MEN**  
EA Redwood Shores create with *The Godfather*, unaware it's a waste of time.

2005



**PLEASE SIR**  
With their *GTA* botch-job complete, they ask to work on some kick ass sci-fi horror.

2006

**TA-DAA**  
Six months later they present their overlords with a prototype of *Dead Space*. Jaws drop.

2007



**WATCH THIS SPACE**  
*Dead Space* limbers up for some gamer love. And in all likelihood receives it.

2008

EA calls it 'strategic dismemberment', but I call it 'lopping bits off them until they stop clawing at your face'



HUD clutter is transferred to the weaponry itself.

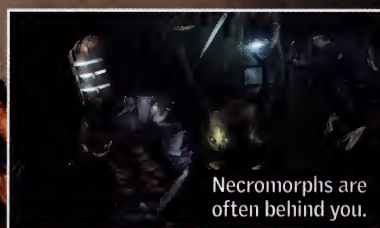


"Where the hell did the wall go?"





The visor is confusingly similar to those in *Tiberium* – if you squint.



Necromorphs are often behind you.



Gooley is the new scary.



You can dice up human corpses too.

## System of a Frown

Did *Dead Space* start out life as *System Shock 3*?

*Dead Space*, clearly, shares a lot in common with the space-based frivolities of *System Shock*. The dead ship, the reanimated crew, the scariness – it's not as clever and the gameplay couldn't be more different but the setting, at least, is there. No wonder then, that rumours were sparked when it stirred during its gestation at the Redwood Shores branch of EA in the same studio that produced the risible *Godfather* game. The big question is, was it a coincidence when EA publicly renewed trademark protection on the license in January 2006? And how about when they threw a hissy fit about *BioShock* having a capital 's' in it, and then backing down? If *Dead Space* were headed for a *System Shock* monicker then EA have wisely seen sense somewhere along the line, but it's just the sort of daft idea that could have cropped up in an executive board meeting deep within the EA mothership.

SHODAN: One of a kind.



it's impossible to work out where their weak spots are. Combat works through a system that EA call 'strategic dismemberment', but I call 'lopping bits off them with laser wedges until they stop clawing at your face'.

Being an engineer your tools are like laser-enhanced versions of the cheese wires and bacon cutters you'll find behind a Tesco deli counter – and as an array of teeth and bile scuttles towards you it's up to you to take aim with three *Predator*-style lights and chop off legs, heads, toes and nadders until all that's left is a pile of limbs and a cloud of arterial spray. A certain bloody nightmare creature may be best dealt with through a slice at the knees for example, though exactly which knees you'll have to surmise through trial, error and an element of terrified blind fire. Break a foe in two and the chances are both parts will claw their way across the floor to you; consider an enemy decapitated, don't be surprised if a head grows legs and jumps onto a table. Frankly, it's terrifying.

Obviously then, there's an element of *Soldier of Fortune* in the dismemberment stakes – you can take apart dead humans if you so wish as well – but the end result feels a lot more like the *Resi* blueprint combined with the motions of firing circular saws at zombies in *Half-Life 2*'s Ravenholm. The Freeman cribbing doesn't end there though – among Isaac's engineering paraphernalia is a gravity toy whose *modus operandi* we're more than

accustomed to, while the environmental puzzles in which it's used certainly aren't a million miles away from Valve-central. One tool that's entirely fresh however, to my knowledge at least, is the ability to place individual enemies (and indeed bits of furniture and thrown severed heads) into a personal slow-motion field – giving you time to choose the most pertinent slicing shot given your steadily falling ammo supplies.

## BORROWING BETRUGER

*Doom 3* probably wins through in the comparison stakes though and, before you start, it's the stuff that id got right (or stole from *System Shock 2*) that's been aped. For a start there's that feeling of dank solitude and organic invasion that, away from the combat, *Doom 3* nailed. Then there's the audio logs left by the recently deceased and mutated – although this time slightly bereft of ammo locker codes.

Also, do you remember how in the Mars UAC base you'd be able to point and click with your mouse when you approached a computer screen? *Dead Space* does that too, although this time it's with your own personal hologram system – instead of lumbering round with a PDA (which is so three years ago), inventory screens, RPG-lite upgrade utilities and information logs are conjured up in realtime right in front of your masked face – letting you point and click away with no hint of a traditional interface, and also watch out for tip-tapping monsters through



## Professional killers

The games that prove you don't have to be a soldier to face down terror in the workplace...



**ENGINEER:** In *Dead Space* Isaac Clarke uses his engineering know-how to slice alien scum into pieces with laser blasts and turn on big machines.



**MECHANIC:** In *Prey*, Tommy's training in a garage helps when he hits aliens with a wrench. Before finding non-existent faults with their carburettor.



**SCIENTIST:** In *Half-Life* physicist Gordon Freeman forgoes researching stuff, and pushes carts of alien stuff into wibbly lights and kills people.



**LECTURER:** Rather than publish theses and flirt with undergraduates, Bjorn of the Peggle Institute battles with the evil blue and orange pegs.



"HUG!"

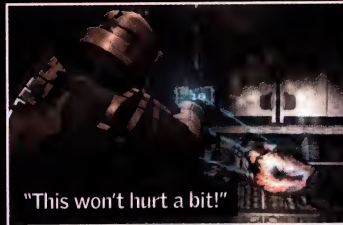
its blue-tinged transparency as the ship continues its morose machinations around you. In fact, so intent are the EA bunch on removing the usual clutter that your health is shown in lights along your character's spine and your energy reserves on a gauge on his suit. It's intriguing stuff.

My favourite yardstick by which *Dead Space* measures itself, however, is *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*. You may think that by this I mean the

bit where Kirk finds an unexpected weak spot in his foe when he kicks an alien in the knees and actually connects with its genitals, but no! The best sequence in that film takes place in zero gravity, when an unknown assailant in gravity boots boards a *Bird of Prey* and blasts a Klingon's arm off – filling the ship with bubbles of pink blood. *Dead Space* recreates this brilliantly, although perhaps without so much bad CG haemoglobin, in sequences that piss all over the faux-float zero-g nature of *Crysis* and turn affairs into far more confusing *Descent*-style affairs.

### POLYMORPH

Tromping over a metal floor in an engine room a scorpion-like beast might scuttle towards you for example; your response to which would be to scythe



"This won't hurt a bit!"

off its claws with a laser blast and watch it quiver as it loses its anchors and drifts harmlessly into the middle of the room.

Then, to jump to the ceiling or any other part of the environment, you take aim with one of your gadgets turn your boots off for a second and find yourself standing atop it – with down now up, and up now down. The gravity boots never come off, but the beautifully floating debris, and the




Don't drop your keys.

imminent peril afforded by a steadily ticking down oxygen supply, make it perfectly clear that *Dead Space* is truly capitalising on the stuff that makes space simultaneously fascinating and terrifying. There are even levels whispered of in which you traipse across the surface of the ship itself (\*cough\* *Star Trek: First Contact*).

### END SPACE

In many ways *Dead Space* is a direct rebuff to a game like *Prey* which, despite the death-bottoms and the gravity cleverness, felt airtight and safe compared to the bleak void and rusted powerless hulks on offer here. Levels are draped with that constant aura of imminent danger that so often demarcates the line between a good game and an average one, which is why you should honestly follow its progress as it veers from the journalist amuse-bouche that I've been fed and the fully-formed game that it shall become. The hope being that its storyline (rumoured to feature an imperilled love interest – hoorah!) can match its faultless atmosphere of danger, despair and decay.

Some may say that its obvious cribbing shows a lack of imagination, but my response to that is to point out that I've unconsciously mentioned it in the same breath of some of the greatest games and sci-fi movies ever created. For a game that's come out of nowhere yet impressed so much, that's high praise indeed. 

**Dead Space is truly capitalising on the stuff that makes space simultaneously fascinating and terrifying**



Never become an astral space engineer.



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*Will Porter*

Will Porter, editor

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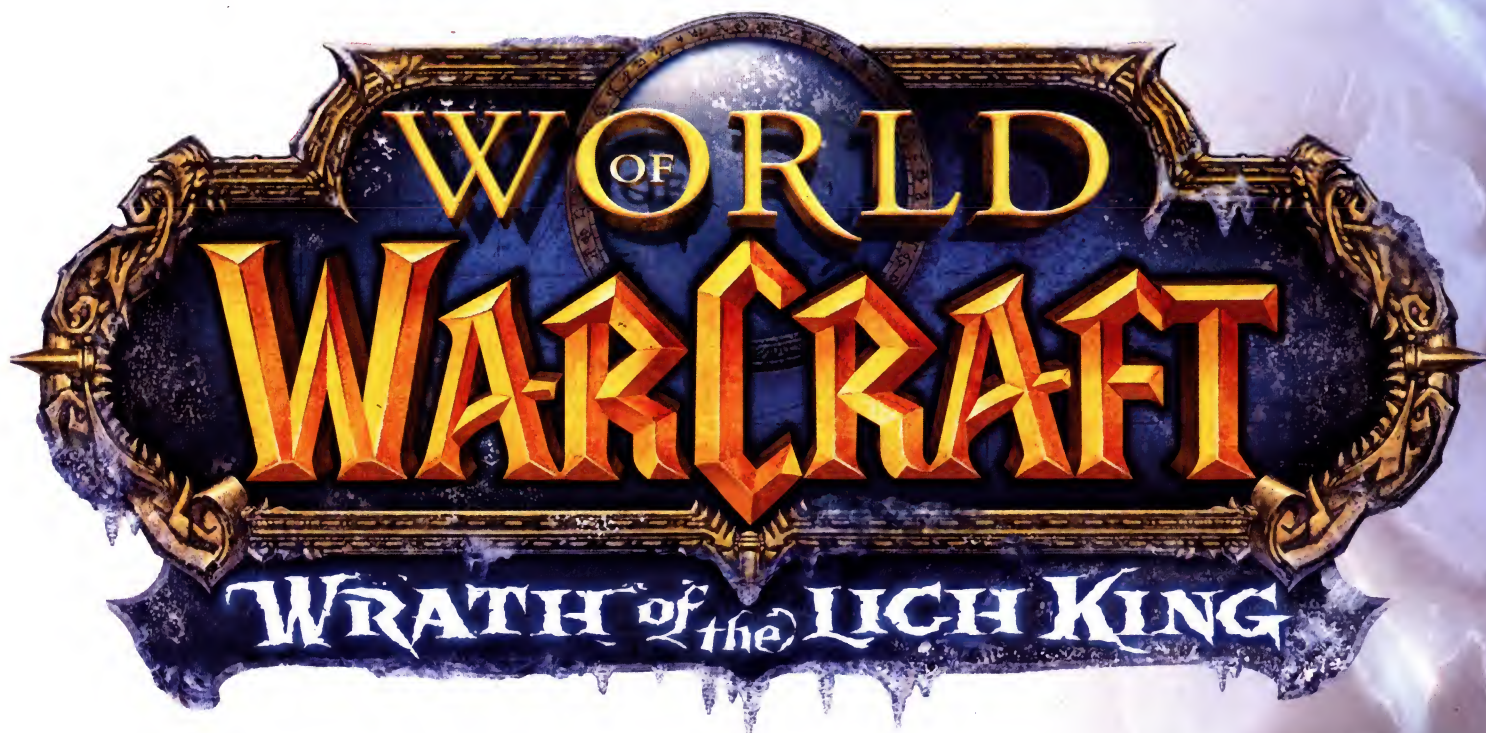
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Everything you ever wanted to know about  
the new continent of Northrend but were afraid to ask...

by *Ed Zitron*

## Item 1: Knowing the Lore...

**O**NE OF THE most amazing things about *World of Warcraft* is how well its backstory ties in with Blizzard's *Warcraft* RTS games. The level of detail in its stories and characters, and the way they all interact, is astonishing. So a working knowledge of *Warcraft III* may not give absolute meaning to your endless monster killing, but at least makes you feel part of a glorious whole.

The Lich King was the main human character of *Warcraft III* – the paladin Prince Arthas Menethil. Arthas's downfall began in the fifth mission of *Warcraft III* in the city of Stratholme, where the entire population had consumed grain poisoned by the Undead Scourge, dooming them to a pallid complexion for evermore. Stratholme is a *WOW* dungeon these days, somewhat revived since Arthas culled the entire town before consequently hightailing after the nasty Dreadlord responsible, Mal'Ganis, to Northrend. Which is where the new and exciting northern continent of Azeroth first got a look in.

Arriving on the shores of Northrend, Arthas shared pleasantries with some Dwarves, who let slip about a powerful runeblade called Frostmourne. Before they could search for it, though, a call came through from the human city of Lordaeron (currently sitting in ruins atop the Undead capital of Undercity) telling them to come home. The troops attempted to return, only to find a crazed Arthas had decided to set fire to their ships (blaming the mercenaries he had hired and murdering them) stranding his men. This was the first sign that he was going mental, and another sign that there'd be a ton more top-down RTS warfare before the day was out.

Arthas later found the blade in Drak'Tharon Keep and, ignoring the large sign saying "Warning, cursed blade, will destroy your soul," took it, got a curse and lost his soul. It soon turns out that the Dreadlord Mal'Ganis had been sent by the Burning Legion (the *Burning Crusade* demons who want Azeroth destroyed) to corrupt Arthas into

becoming an evil Lich King in just that fashion. So Arthas goes on to stab him in protest.

### GO NORTH YOUNG MAN

The story then has a few months pass, before Arthas returns home with a somewhat deeper voice and mad eyes. He kills his father, the human king, and runs away, gaining followers in the form of The Cult of the Damned. He leads the mindless Undead Scourge around Azeroth and ends up creating the sex-hungry mana-spilling Blood Elves (later to become one of *The Burning Crusade*'s playable factions) by wrecking that Sunwell they bleat on about – in fact using it to bring a necromancer mate back to life and half-destroying Silvermoon City in the process.

Arthas then gets passed a message from his newly reanimated necromancer buddy that the Burning Legion's master, Archimonde can be summoned through a spell book residing in peaceful environs of Dalaran. Cue summoning of big nasty

demon, cue destruction of the city-state of Dalaran (at least until it returns as a flying city in *Lich King*). At this point *Warcraft III* expansion pack *The Frozen Throne* enters the catalogue of lore. Due to mysteriously fading Lich-puppet powers, a splinter group broke away from the Undead Scourge and called themselves the Forsaken (who are now a sentient, playable Undead faction in *WOW*). Concerned, Arthas heads north, where the Frozen Throne of Northrend is under attack by the Blood Elves.

Arriving in Northrend, Arthas battles away: annoying Dwarves and the claret-eyed Elven forces of Illidan Stormrage (who ultimately becomes the corrupted boss of the first *WOW* expansion pack *The Burning Crusade*). The last you see of Arthas is him walking towards the Frozen Throne, where he puts on the Lich King's helm and fuses with the Lord of the Undead, creating a physical form for the long-ethereal creature. So, basically you should get levelling, because he's not going to kill himself, is he? **PCZ**



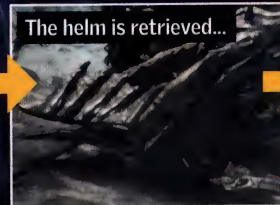
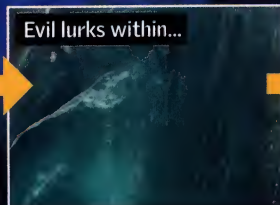
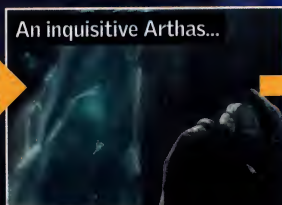
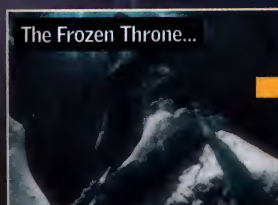


*"It has begun, young heroes... I was once like you. You have come to this place seeking to bring judgement upon the damned. You will venture deep into forgotten lands. You will see wonders beyond imagining. But be warned. The land itself will rise up against you. Long forgotten terrors will smother your courage. Sacrifice everything as the final darkness falls... in the end, all that awaits you is death. Only then will you understand - you've been following in my footsteps all along. So come then, you heroes! Come in all your power and glory! For in the final hour, all must serve the one... true... king."*

The former Arthas Menethil, now reigning Lich King

## Fall of a prince, rise of a king

The ending cinematic sequence of The Frozen Throne put under scrutiny





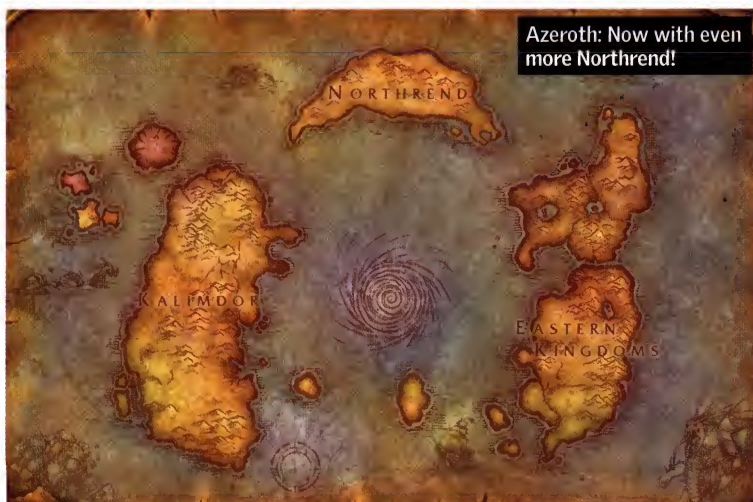


# Item 2: Straight from the skeletal horse's mouth...

What better way to travel  
than by flaming chain-boat?



**Jeff Kaplan, the lead designer on *World of Warcraft*, explains just how you'll itch that Lich...**



Azeroth: Now with even  
more Northrend!

**S**O WHY DO you have to be so obscenely powerful to enter the Lich King's kingdom? "We think that the players between levels 30 and 40 already have so many things to do in *WOW* that they haven't run out of content yet," explains Jeff Kaplan. "It's really all about the players who've reached max level, whether they solo or whether they PvP, whether they raid or roleplay: if they are max level they all feel that they want more."

As such the entry zones in Northrend are aimed at levels between 68 and 70, and are interestingly a million miles away from your first faltering steps through *The Burning Crusade's* Dark Portal. Back then it was dramatic, but the entirety of Azeroth seemed to be on the other side – with everyone crammed into a single place and hoping they didn't lag out, kill each other, or both.

This time, however, you're entering into either the lush, verdant Howling

Fjord or the autumn-tinged Borean Tundra, and it's a great deal more spread out than before.

"Plus we're giving all new players into the expansion interaction with Arthas," picks up Kaplan.

"We were too protective of Illidan in *The Burning Crusade*, so you're interacting with Arthas straight away. You're talking to him, having these moments with him – you don't have to be a raider just to see him".

## ARTHAS ON THE ROCKS

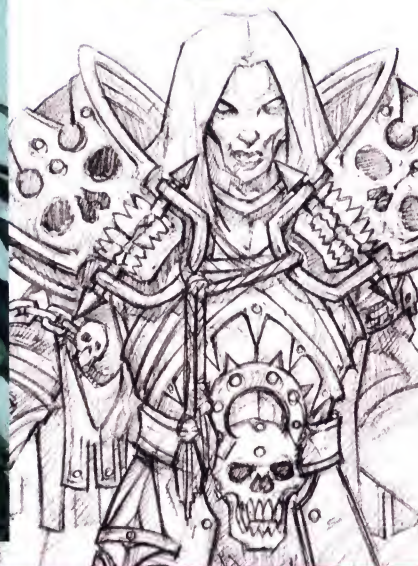
You know the drill kids: get quests, kill shit, collect stuff and dance naked. It's the same template we know and love, but Northrend still brings a gaggle of features to Azeroth's statistical cogs and gears.

For a start, there's a new profession: Inscription. With this, Blizzard are looking to buck the trend of adding stats or useable items, describing Inscription





Can horses ever be sexy? Maybe.



as "Enchanting for spells and abilities," reinventing the wheel in the process.

"The idea behind it is to give players even more specialisation options beyond the talent trees," explains Kaplan in a manner that would bamboozle the *WOW*-phobic to death. "As a possible example, a mage could have their Frost Nova enhanced for either greater range or longer snare duration – our intention is to provide viable options rather than one 'best' Inscription for each modifiable spell or ability."

This, in less complex terms, means that there's potential to differentiate characters here way beyond the 10 extra talent points that players are already looking forward to.

Another change to the expansion format is the introduction of Hero Classes, the first of which is the Death Knight, examples of whom were the Lich King's work experience chaps in *Warcraft III*. In the spirit of balance, though, this character won't be immediately available, requiring legwork to unlock it fully.

"While originally we planned for characters to become Death Knights, we felt that players shouldn't be required to lose the character they've played for so long," explains Kaplan.

"Instead, we're looking at how we can involve players in the story of freeing a Death Knight from the Lich King's grasp through a quest chain. Once complete, this will allow a player to create new high-level Death Knight characters."

What's more, with any luck, we'll see more Hero classes some time after release, the hot Zitron tip being some kind of Archdruid quest directly connected to Malfurion Stormrage and the much-anticipated Emerald Dream.

## SCRAP HEAP

Another group of *WOW* players due to feel some love are those who like to knock bells out of each other – the PvP fraternity. "The major PvP addition will be Lake Wintergrasp, an entire non-instanced zone in Northrend dedicated to world PvP," continues Jeff while miming an axe motion.



Oh baby, it's cold online.

"We're taking what we've learned from world PvP objectives in the Old World and Outland and building on that to provide some truly epic warfare. Players will be able to use siege weapons to assault the other faction's buildings, and earn faction-wide buffs by completing objectives and gaining dominance in the zone." And destructible buildings at that.

Content isn't locked to northern wastes either: "As with *The Burning Crusade*, we're looking to add dungeon content to the old world as well. One that we're very excited about is a new Caverns of Time scenario based on the *Warcraft III* mission 'The Culling'. Players will accompany the still-human

Prince Arthas as he purges the plagued city of Stratholme, a pivotal moment in his fall from noble holy knight to Death Knight."

For the Azeroth cognoscenti, and some impressionable people who've read the lore bulletin in pages previous, this is a big woo. But we're packing up to go and Kaplan isn't finished yet, "It's important to note that we're also adding features to the game that many players are anticipating, such as new character customization options, including new hairstyles and dances!"

So if you want to, you can screw the new content, don your Orc with a Flock of Seagulls mop-top and do the electric boogaloo. Thank you Blizzard! **PCZ**



That's not very feng shui, is it?



The Vrykul are all mountains and no pants.



**Azjol-Nerub**

The inspiration of the Scourge's architecture lies in the ruined catacombs of the Nerubians, sentient arachnids long since conquered (and promptly resurrected) by the Lich King. Now controlled by the Scourge and the mysterious Forgotten Ones, this subterranean zone was left untouched during Arthas' battles with the Nerubians of old – so expect instances, and plenty of loot. You'll also be able to visit the few remaining living Nerubians in the Old Kingdom, where the Dwarves are attempting to keep the entrance of the city shut as protection from the Undead.

*Icecrown Glacier**Sholazar Basin**Lake Wintergrasp**Coldarra**Borean Tundra**The Dragonblight***Entry point 1****Borean Tundra**

The west-most corner of the continent houses an icy entry point into Northrend. The Horde arrive into Warsong Hold, under the command of (deceased Horde champion from *Warcraft III*) Grom Hellscream's son, Garrosh, and the Alliance into the vast Justice Keep on a massive steamship, with both factions battling away against the Naga. Living in Riplash Ruins, the fishy former-Highborne (posh elves to the layman) seek to flood the Tundra with a gigantic ice-melting machine in a '50s supervillain fashion. The other notable faction are the Walrus-esque Tuskarr, who ally themselves with the Horde, eat whales and share similar tribal habits. As well as similar bodily hygiene.



# Item 3: Northrend welcomes careful grinders...

The geography of WOW's new continent under Ordnance Survey-style scrutiny



## The Storm Peaks

### Azjol-Nerub

#### Zul'Drak

Housing the Drakkari ice trolls, Zul'Drak is a huge valley full of little villages, the Troll capital of Gundrak, and the ruins of those conquered in the civil wars leading up to the creation of the Drakkari nation. These Ice Trolls are bigger, meaner and more barbaric than those you've encountered before, inhabiting various smaller tribes under the banner of Frost King Malakk. This is inhospitable territory for both Horde and Alliance, steeped in ancient, newly uncovered lore and angry, icy fauna.



#### Howling Fjord

To the east is the lush Howling Fjord, proving that Northrend isn't purely ice. Reached through Daggercap Bay (where Arthas first arrived), the Alliance stop in at Valgarde by boat from an unknown (as of yet) location, and the Horde reach New Agamand – named after the Agamand Family found in the undead starter zone Tirisfal Glades, thus inspiring the new Tim Burton-style Forsaken architecture. With verdant areas at water's edge, moving up into snowy vistas and pine forests that have been set ablaze – it's a beautiful area. Both Horde and Alliance will be called to deal with a bunch of newly awakened half-giant Vrykul, attacking from the village of Nifflevar and the instanced content at Utgarde Keep.



### Zul'Drak

### Grizzly Hills

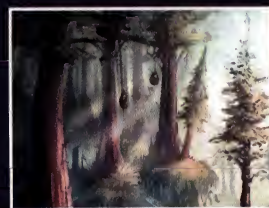
#### Drak'Tharon Keep

This two-part instance leads in from two zones, The Grizzly Hills (leading to the 72-74 wing) and Zul'Drak (leading to the 74-76 wing). This former Ice Troll citadel has been home to the Scourge, so there'll be some undead Troll action just waiting for you. This keep also formerly held Frostmourne, the runeblade that turned Arthas into a Death Knight, and drove him insane.



#### Grizzly Hills

The Grizzly Hills are like Ashenvale meets the Hinterlands, populated with all manner of Furbolgs, Ice Trolls, and even the ever-present threat of the Venture Co., seeking to turn a hasty profit in the war against the Scourge. The Dwarven camp of Thor Modan stands to the north-east, giving the Alliance respite from the cold and the constant bear attacks. Expect giant trees, rolling hills, and a big PvP fight, much like the Arenas in Hellfire Peninsula. Bordering the zone is the lower-level (72-74) part of the instanced Drak'Tharon Keep.



### Howling Fjord

#### Utgarde Keep

Leading in from the Howling Fjord, the Keep (similar in many ways to Hellfire Citadel) is populated by the Vrykul, notably the Dragonflayer Clan, who are arming themselves to do battle with the Alliance and Horde. Made up of three wings, the keep has content for the higher 10 levels, such as the Catacombs (levels 70-72), Pinnacle (level 80), and the third wing is pure raid content, in all likelihood placing you in battle with King Ymiron, king of the Vrykuls. And local Scrabble champion.



Entry point 2



## PvP Bundling

The best fights on ice since *Torvill and Dean*

Lake Wintergrasp should try to bring PvP to the casual players. While there will be a large scale to the combat, it will be easier to drop in and out and gain honour at a casual rate. Hardcore PvP-ers will be supported on a huge scale, adding destructible buildings and siege weapons to the zone and giving big honour to those who spend a great deal of time there. It's also likely that the new season of Arena gear will be reliant on success in Wintergrasp – or in the other new, unnamed, PvP map. We can probably expect special daily quests, and even droppable gear based on the zone.

Alterac Valley: not quite as cool as Lake Wintergrasp.



**Death Knights are the bad boys of the Lich King, and it won't be an easy path to get to become one**

## Dalaran

Like the flying city in *Gulliver's Travels* only with less satire

Not content with actually making a city in Northrend, for fear of damaging the all-important scenery, the main city of *Wrath of the Lich King* is actually a huge floating mass, central to the map. Fact-fans will recognise the name as the one destroyed in *Warcraft III* and now covered by a huge Ribena-coloured shield and kept in the distance in the Alterac Mountains in *WOW*. The city is one and the same and it's due to be, though no-one yet knows how, floated by the magical denizens of the Kirin Tor above Northrend in their attempt to take on both the Blue Dragonflight and the Lich King.

Dalaran is going to be the Shattrath City of *Wrath of the Lich King*, offering a faction-neutral place to prepare and rest. Now, Blizzard haven't said whether or not they're going to be forcing you to use flying mounts to get there, but I'd wager that there'll be another way – be it a quest, a flightpath, or some other teleportation method. I severely doubt players will be forced to fly up there, though it could certainly be an option. Due to their history with them, The Kirin Tor will also have a series of quests guaranteed to lead to confrontations with the Blue Dragonflight, who have made their home in the nearby Dragonblight.

Dalaran is the fuschia. Arf-arf.



# Item 4: Good Omens

More than ever before, *Warcraft* lore and some educated guesswork hold vital clues to the structure of Northrend. But there's also that release date...

**F**IRST OFF, *THE Lich King's* release date is still firmly under wraps, but a public beta running for several months up to the official release is a dead cert. Not only did the *The Burning Crusade* get one, but Christmas gifts sent out by Blizzard to its most devoted fans came adorned with a beta code for an unnamed product – which suggests it can't be far off. Here at PCZ we're putting our money on a beta come mid-summer, and a release before autumn gets under way. The third part of our somewhat hazy guesswork is that *Starcraft II* is aimed at a Christmas release. We could have it completely wrong though – Blizzard are notorious for having complete information embargos on important issues like release dates. As for content, however, due to the sheer amount of lore available through the peripheral books and the trading card game, and *Warcraft III*, there's a fair bit that we can speculate about with a hefty degree of accuracy...

## The Dragonblight

Where 'Here be dragons' is genuinely found on AA road maps

Former *Warcraft III* fans may remember the Dragonblight as a bonus map. In *Wrath of the Lich King*, this is going to be an epic zone. In *Warcraft* lore, it's the place where dragons come to die, and thus is littered with the hulking skeletons of the fallen beasts. Naturally though, a lot of them haven't been allowed to fade away – what with the Lich King living next door. So it's a definite that there'll be some kind of higher-level encounter with Undead dragons, drakes, and smaller draconians. This isn't to say there won't be living dragons – the Blue Dragonflight, led by Malygos, are nearby and have declared war on all magic kind, making Dalaran a prime target, and all of you pansy Alliance mages, too. In fact, though you'll also have to tangle with the rest of his Blue Dragonflight to approach him, Jeff Kaplan has

Dead dragons, Blade's Edge Mountains style.



confirmed that Malygos will be a level 80 raid encounter in Coldarra.

As for people pitching their tent in Dragonblight though, the Scourge have colonised the North, towards where the Icecrown Glacier begins, as well as the entrance to the fallen city and instances of Azjol-Nerub. Regardless of the huge scale of the zone, it still offers content for players in their low-70s.

## Death Knight

Dethnite plz. Dethnite pliz! kk thx bye

Everyone and their cat is going to dash to get the first Death Knight, and while Blizzard has said "everyone can do it," let's not get too hasty there, cowboy. Death Knights are the bad boys of the Lich King, and you can bet your sweet behind that it won't be an easy path to become one. We could be talking a timesink something in the region of the keys needed to access some of the dungeons of *The Burning Crusade*. Perhaps not that bad, but certainly something your casual player won't just be able to solo their way through and post on the internet about. Although, of course, I will be soloing my way through it and posting about it on the internet.

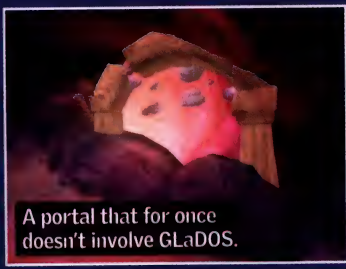


## Caverns of Time

Still managing to better Wookey Hole

While not strictly part of Northrend, the culling of Stratholme featured in the caverns of time is based on the fifth mission from *Warcraft III*, revitalized as a five-man, level 80 instance. It tracks the beginning of Arthas' downfall as he culls the city of Stratholme's Scourge-infected residents, with the final part taking on the powerful Dreadlord Mal'Ganis.

There can be no doubt that some artistic license will be taken with the difficulty (it was a breeze back in the RTS days) since the Caverns of Time difficulty curve so far has been much like being beaten with a hammer. A beautiful, fascinating and tightly scripted hammer – but a hammer nonetheless.



A portal that for once doesn't involve GLaDOS.



31 (M) Death Knight, Looking For Love/Souls to Reap.





## Power to the PvP

A bit like *Fight Club*. Only with more loot

While you've been Blizzard have added the concept of the PvP Arena series to *WOW*.

This allows competitive players to group into teams of two versus two, three versus three, or five versus five, and fight both their or the other faction for Arena Points – and gain epic-quality loot to boot.

This is raid-level PvP content, allowing those who would rather kill others than the computer to have a fighting chance at gaining good enough gear to (if they so please) attempt that dang old heroic content. With each oncoming Season of the Arena, there's new loot, and the old loot gets a 15 per cent discount. In general, Blizzard intends to progress the seasons at a steady pace, with a new one coming in *The Lich King*.

All this means that even if you prefer PvE *WOW*, you can still give PvP a go and see if you like it.

Warsong Gulch is actually a lot of fun.



# Item 5: Missing the War

Are you a faded Azeroth Hero? Did you get lost and give up after reaching level 70, or even earlier? Well, here's what you missed...

**THE DEAL WITH** games like *WOW* is that they change, and sometimes change a lot, as anyone who has sat through almost a gig of patching can more than testify to. To this end, Blizzard introduce tons of tweaks, animations, and new dungeons on a (fairly) regular basis. Just last week *PC ZONE*'s Steve Hogarty was delighted to discover that his pet raptor, Bitey, had suddenly been granted a swimming animation, suddenly leaving him with nothing to moan about whenever we're at the pub.

An obvious change for a returning hero, meanwhile, is the fact that the UI has been updated – letting you search for particular salesmen or questholders on your mini-map while gifting your screen a smattering of extra icons. Smallfry stuff, admittedly, but hugely convenient as soon as you notice its newfound existence. But what of the groundbreaking changes that have been made since the last time you logged on?

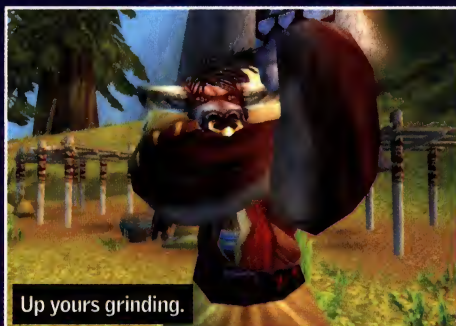
## The Grind Curve

Less monsters, more experience, no catch

Those of you who may have given up before even reaching the top will be happy to know that, as a result of feedback (read: people complaining like complainers love to), the middle chunk of *WOW* has been squashed to make the trawl from levels 20 to 60 a lot more pleasant. Blizzard quote a spurious percentage to show how much easier it is, but we've been levelling new characters to try it out.

Not only has quest experience been increased between levels 30-60, the entire curve is noticeably easier on you – you'll spend less time hanging around zones, and get a lot more bang for your buck on some of the tougher quests. Drop-rates have been increased noticeably on some quests, and Dustwallow Marsh is now a great deal better. The addition of Mudsprocket and some additional goblin quests within adds depth to the zone – and gives you an extra flightpath; useful considering the size of it all.

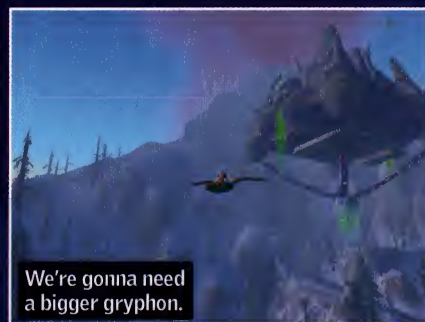
Dungeons have also been tweaked to be more rewarding, and overall patch 2.3 has made the lower levels a joy – so if you're hoping to start anew, not only is there still time to level up, but it's going to be a lot of fun.



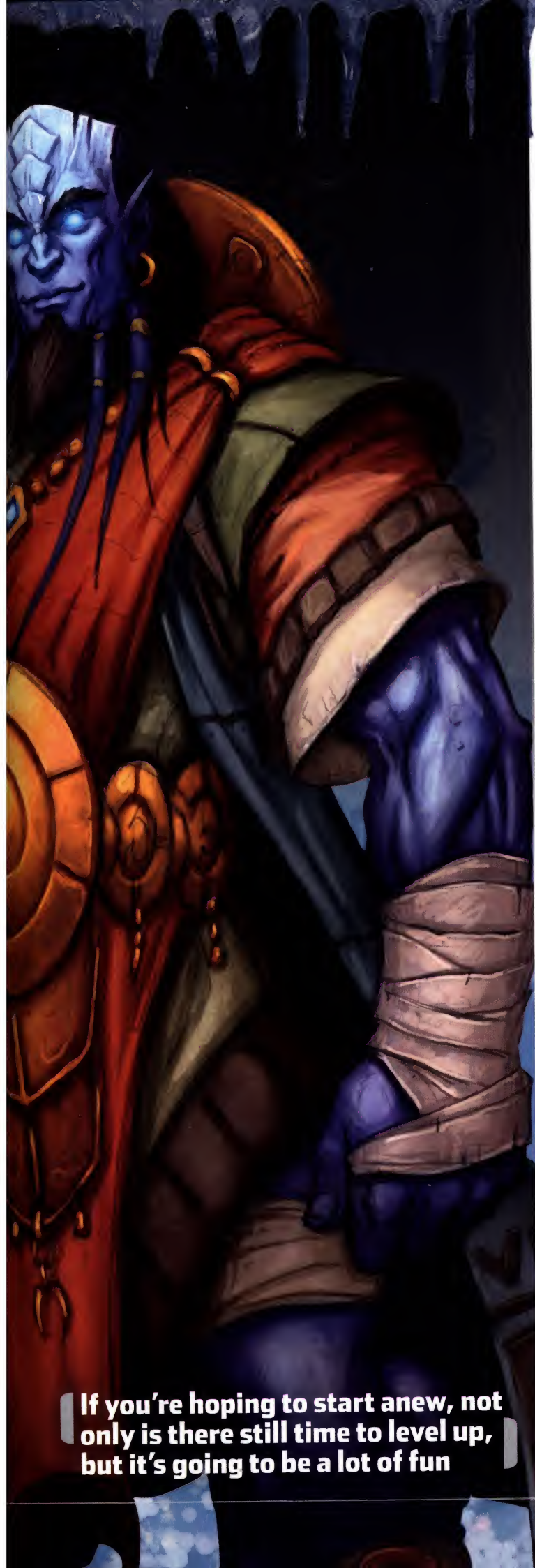
## Fr'instance

Instant instance information

Naxxramas and Zul'Aman are the newest instances – one released before *The Burning Crusade*, one released after. Naxxramas operates as a high-level raid dungeon, built for those able to compete in the higher level guilds, but Zul'Aman is an easily-accessible dungeon released recently for players burned out on Karazhan runs looking for a new challenge. Full of angry, tribal Forest Trolls, Zul'Aman should prepare you for the Trolls of Zul'Drak – and dealing with the icy instanced content of Drak Tharon Keep.







## Item 6: **But I'm not ready!**

Here are our top five mods to help you prepare for the perils of *The Lich King*



### **QuestHelper**

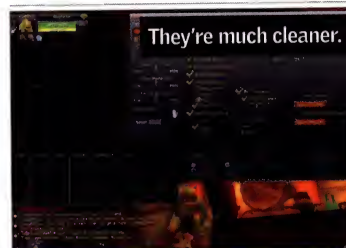
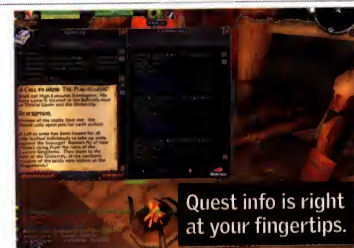
[www.curse.com/downloads/details/9924/](http://www.curse.com/downloads/details/9924/)

*QuestHelper* is a user-populated database that personally maps out your quests onto the map, showing you not only where to go and where to hand in certain quests, but also the optimal order to complete them in. This takes a lot of the frustration and time-wasting in large-scale areas like Stranglethorn Vale, and helps you keep track of quests. It's like steroids for *WoW*.

### **LightHeaded**

[www.wowinterface.com/downloads/info7017-LightHeaded.html](http://www.wowinterface.com/downloads/info7017-LightHeaded.html)

*LightHeaded* modifies your quest panel to include a side box with information streamed directly from the Wowhead database, and lets you browse the comments. More importantly, it gives you locations, follow-up quests, and tips about how to deal with a certain quest, and any fun blips there may be on the way.



### **X-Perl Unit Frames**

[www.curse.com/downloads/details/3416/](http://www.curse.com/downloads/details/3416/)

*X-Perl* helps bring method to the madness that are *WoW* user interfaces. Adding a clean, easy-to-read front-end and giving you more immediate information on both you and your groupmates, it's easily one of the best additions to the UI around. The frames are moveable with a mere click of the top-right menu and are as simple to deal with as *Windows* itself – a real winner.

### **Bagnon**

[www.curse.com/downloads/details/2090/](http://www.curse.com/downloads/details/2090/)

A new expansion guarantees one thing – new bags. This can be a bit overwhelming when you start getting a lot of them. *Enter Bagnon*, a mod that condenses all of your bags to one inventory, cleanly organised and oh-so-much simpler than searching through your stuff mid-combat, urgently scrambling for your potions. It also cleans up your bank a great deal – it's simplicity at its best.



### **BuyEmAll**

[www.curse.com/downloads/details/3586/](http://www.curse.com/downloads/details/3586/)

If you're a rogue, you need vanishing powder. If you're a hunter, ammo. If you're a mage, teleport runes. Every class needs to have a lot of some item at any given time, and *BuyEmAll* lets you buy hundreds of items at once – and tells you the overall price, making it a must for anyone prepping for a trip. It uses a slick, simple interface, and is a welcome addition to any constant vendor-user.

**If you're hoping to start anew, not only is there still time to level up, but it's going to be a lot of fun**



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PCZONE

## REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

## Pop Quiz

**S**EEING AS I'M spinning metaphorical plates this issue you're having to put up with my mug twice in one magazine. I'm sorry. I'm not half as youthful as I once was. Never mind though, as it allows me to harp on about quiz show games for no apparent reason. I'm a sucker for quiz show games – I own all the *Buzz!* PlayStation 2 quizzes and I even played *Family Fortunes* on PC – simply because Les Dennis did a funny dance.

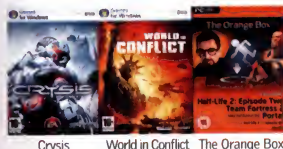
Sometimes quiz games really work, but often terrible developers and quick-buck publishers combine to create excrement like *Chegger's Party Quiz* (reviewed last issue, 10%) and *Deal or No Deal* (reviewed on page 79, 3%) – a quiz game that doesn't even have any questions in it. And what's with the fascination of making the host so look like a melted waxwork? Tarrant, Chegwin, and now Edmonds – all looking like they've come in at just the wrong part of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Just bring back *You Don't Know Jack*! This is all.

Will Porter

Will Porter, editor

## Must Buys!

**PC ZONE Classics** are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



## 72 UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT

They come from space, scrap in our terrestrial garden, and don't even say hello... typical

## The PC ZONE Awards



## CLASSIC (90%+)

The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



## RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns PC ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



## DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

## AND THE REST



## ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



## EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



## ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

## The PC ZONE gaming machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: [www.xworksinteractive.com](http://www.xworksinteractive.com).



## ALSO REVIEWED

- 76 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE: PAYBACK**  
Classic xenophobic ultraviolence
- 78 JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS**  
Play with cars and stare at women
- 79 CSI: HARD EVIDENCE**  
Play with swabs and fingerprint dust
- 79 DEAL OR NO DEAL**  
Play something that isn't really a game
- 80 PDC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2008**  
Play darts without going to the pub
- 82 MY HORSE AND ME**  
Play with ponies by shovelling dung
- 82 SUNAGE**  
Eco-friendly real-time strategy
- 84 THE GOLDEN COMPASS**  
One for atheist prepubescent
- 85 SUDDEN STRIKE 3: ARMS FOR VICTORY**  
World War II RTS. Hoorah!
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A hatful of indie-schminnie classics
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The Hierarchy can mutate humans into shambling, killer zombies.

# UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT

**Martin Korda gives up on hope on defeating intergalactic invaders solely by coughing phlegm in their general direction**



**DEVELOPER** Petroglyph  
**PUBLISHER** Sega  
**WEBSITE** [www.sega.com/gamesite/universeatwar](http://www.sega.com/gamesite/universeatwar)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99



## AT A GLANCE...

Frenetic sci-fi RTS from the makers of *Empire at War* centring on a conflict between three diverse and technologically advanced alien races.

**Minimum system requirements:**  
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128 MB video card.

## HOW IT STACKS

**WORLD IN CONFLICT** 92%

**SUPREME COMMANDER** 88%

**UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT** 79%

**ARGUING WITH PETROGLYPH'S** RTS pedigree is daft. With many of its members having cut their teeth on the *C&C* series and with the solid *Star Wars: Empire at War* under its belt, much was expected from the developer's next RTS.

Without question, *Empire at War* was a top-quality strategy game, one which commendably melded epic space battles with land-based missions. But while the intergalactic slugfest proved both feverishly exciting and innovative the land-based skirmishes were lacklustre by comparison, hardly a good omen given that *Universe at War's* battles are exclusively set on terra firma. So understandably, we had our concerns when this game arrived for review.

## RIGHT OR WRONG?

But our worries had no basis in fact. Clearly, the bods at Petroglyph have had a long hard think about the criticisms levelled at *Empire*

at *War's* land battles, as *Universe at War's* missions have taken the best elements from its predecessor's intergalactic scraps and injected them into ground-based battles that teem with mayhem, explosions and unbridled carnage.

Proceedings kick off in the year 2012, when Earth has come under attack by a technologically superior alien race called the Hierarchy. With 90 per cent of the planet's military in ruins, a gruff voiced, mini-gun toting US colonel, who ticks every box on the action hero stereotype checklist, leads the remnants of the US army in a last-ditch attempt to repel the invaders. All seems lost until suddenly, another technologically advanced robotic alien race called the Novus appears to help humanity in its fight against the aggressor race. Now that's luck. So begins a war between age-old enemies the Hierarchy and Novus. Their war, our world, to coin a phrase from recent celluloid robotic flick *Transformers*.



This clash of sentient machines starts with you commanding the Novus, a race of emotionless robots that considers the Hierarchy as a cancer that needs to be eliminated from the universe. Amongst their ranks is a lone human, Mirabel, who attempts to educate her logic-obsessed masters about the merits of morality, by displaying empathy for mankind that transcends her robotic comrades' single-minded desire to eliminate the Hierarchy, no matter what the cost.

Novus's battlefield technology is made up of a collection of mechanised foot soldiers, lumbering artillery units that can encase nearby allies in protective shields and nippy, lightly armoured aerial units. However, the faction's true genius doesn't lie in its satisfying – if somewhat by-the-numbers – arsenal, but in the way its troops can traverse wide expanses in mere seconds by using Flow technology, which transports units along linked



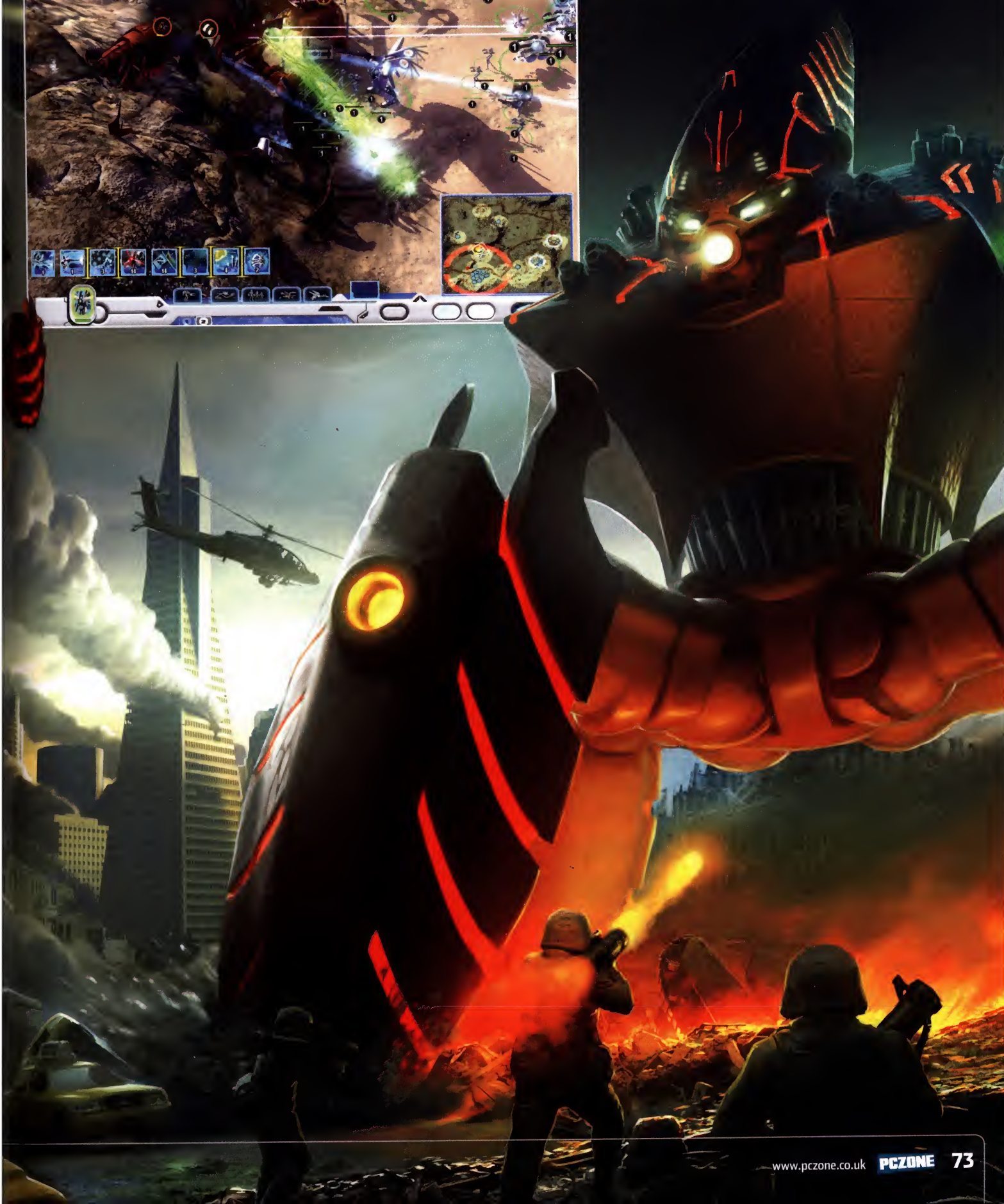


The quickest way of taking down a giant walker is to target its hard points.

- Protect the Home Portal at all costs
- Destroy the Assembly Walker



**What the Hierarchy lack in speed they more than make up for with sheer firepower**







Personally, I'd be running right about now.



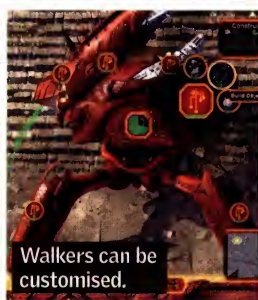
Novus and the Hierarchy have been at war for centuries.



## Four legs are better than two

War machine or mobile base? You decide...

The most powerful units in the game are the Hierarchy's walkers. These beasts can be equipped with a wide range of offensive, defensive and construction capabilities, allowing you to customise each to the mission's needs. With numerous hard points dotted around its ample structure, you can choose to turn your walker into a bristling war machine by equipping it with plasma cannons, weapon chargers and armour plating, or a construction vehicle that can churn out new units in a war zone. Each of these hard points can be targeted and destroyed. Once a walker's armour has been obliterated, the quickest way to take one down is to target its power cores, then step back and watch the pyrotechnics.



## The moralising may be a touch heavy handed, its mere presence adds an emotional slant to the storyline

electrical nodes. Naturally, these relays have to be built first, but once you've set up a network across a map, you can traverse an entire level with a sizeable force within a matter of seconds.

### YING AND YANG

Unlike their goody-goody adversaries, the Hierarchy aren't nearly as manoeuvrable, but what they lack in speed they more than make up for with sheer firepower, with several titanic four-legged customisable walkers at their disposal (head over to the Four Legs Are Better Than Two panel for more on these).

The game's final faction is the Masari, a mystical people thought extinct until the Hierarchy accidentally raise them from their slumber when they decide to use some Egyptian pyramids for target practice. This druid-like race can switch between upgradeable Light, Dark and Balance powers (offence, defence, and a happy medium), providing an excellent alternative to its more rigidly structured adversaries.

By the end of the 20+ mission campaign you'll have bloodied your hands as all four races, with each mini campaign featuring its own sub-plots and unexpected twists, turns and surprises. The plot as a whole is worthy

of praise, as it genuinely attempts to inject an ethical vein into the proceedings, and while much of the moralising may be a touch heavy handed, its mere presence adds an emotional slant to the storyline, which threatens to descend into cliché at first.

Watching your units in action is a joy to behold, as vehicles pummel each other with devastating attacks that make the somewhat dated engine look more impressive than it really is. By pressing the Cinematic View button, you can watch the firefights from the units' point of view, though more often than not you're left cursing in frustration as the so-called intuitive camera interface points in the wrong direction, forcing you to miss the brutal slugfest that's unfolding tantalisingly off screen.

### WE NEED ANOTHER HERO

The further you progress into *Universe at War*, the more comparisons you'll begin to draw with the likes of *Rise of Nations*, *Rise of Legends* and *WarCraft III*. The numerous, varied factions. The emphasis on hero units. The multiple points of view. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that if you enjoyed either of these games, it's likely you'll find plenty to entertain you here, most notably if you're a



Each unit has at least one special ability.



Maybe we should try harpooning its legs.



fan of hero-centric RTS gameplay.

Each faction has its own unique super units, replete with special abilities. Novus' main hero is a giant, flying robotic suit piloted by Mirabel that can spit out clusters of rockets at enemies and take out enemies with a single, considered sniper shot. Orlok, the Hierarchy's champion is a lumbering robotic shell that can soak up more punishment than Rocky Balboa's cranium and fire barrages of devastating area damaging mortar fire at nearby enemies.

However, unlike its RTS competitors, special abilities aren't merely reserved for heroes in *Universe at War*, as each and every unit possesses at least one secondary skill. These include the ability to capture buildings, raise shields, become invisible or leap great distances in order to reach areas of the map that other units can't access.

Every unit also has a tooltip that provides information about its abilities, strengths and weaknesses, ensuring that you're never left

in doubt as to which unit is best for each situation.

So, with such an impressive collection of unit skills at your disposal, you'd assume that *Universe at War* would be one of the most complete and tactical strategy games of all time. Well, it isn't.

## A MISSING INGREDIENT

For all of its merits and imagination, all its potential and breathtaking battles, *Universe at War* is lacking an essential ingredient of real-time strategy games: strategy.

Yes, units and heroes possess special abilities. Yes, each faction is distinct. But all of this is made redundant by the game's simplicity. It's not long before you start to ignore your units' lovingly created and balanced abilities as you realise that you can just wade through most levels without ever truly worrying about the prospect of defeat. Pretty much the only time you'll see a mission failure message is when your hero dies because you didn't keep an eye on its health bar.



## Free for all

Take your destiny into your own hands...

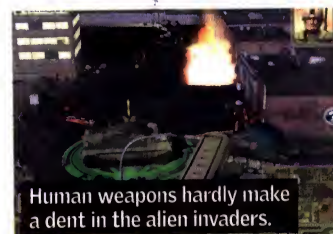
Those of you hoping for a return of *Empire at War*'s freeform campaign map may be disappointed with *Universe at War*'s story driven, linear structure. However, there's an option to play four freeform campaigns on a global map. While some of *Empire at War*'s detail has been stripped out, Petroglyph has had the foresight to cater for those of us who thought their previous game's innovative approach to real-time/turn based campaign map gameplay was a good thing.

It's freeform, but not as we know it.



Another letdown is how contrived the game's attempts are at making you use your units' special abilities, regularly presenting solutions to you on platters rather than tasking you with using your strategic skills to outsmart the level design. Battles also have their problems. Although intense and visually spectacular, these slugfests are all too often one-sided (in your favour), while there's an irritating over-reliance on waves of giant mechanised walkers being thrown at you when you're up against the Hierarchy. To top things off, some clumsy glitches such as losing all sound effects and music midway through missions and some occasionally suspect path-finding and animations mar what is an otherwise well-polished product.

The game's faults are by no means dealbreakers and *Universe at War* contains more than enough merit to warrant your investment, but there's a sense that this is a game that could have been challenging the *Supreme Commander* and *World in Conflict* if it had made of the strategic possibilities offered by its factions. Ultimately, *Universe at War* provides a collection of intense conflicts that thrill more than challenge, some excellent skirmish options, and an OK freeform campaign. If you're looking for a strategy game to fill the void until the next great RTS, *Universe at War* fits the bill. **PCZ**



## PCZONE

Graphics Showing their age  
Sound Good soundtrack and voice acting  
Multiplayer Manic and varied skirmish mode

- ✓ Intense action
- ✓ Imaginative factions
- ✓ All heroes and units have secondary abilities
- ✗ Lacks a strategic spine

# 79

Manic, simple, fun





# SOLDIER OF FORTUNE: PAYBACK

*Will Porter* discovers that gently breathing in the direction of a terrorist makes their arms fall off. So hooray for him

**DEVELOPER** Cauldron  
**PUBLISHER** Activision Value  
**WEBSITE**  
[www.mercenarieswanted.com](http://www.mercenarieswanted.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £34.99

## AT A GLANCE...

An all-American hero slaughters gentlemen of Arabic, African and Irish descent because he suspects them of being terrorists.

**Minimum system requirements:**  
 2.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 256MB graphics card. And a patch if you want to run it under Vista.

## HOW IT STACKS

CALL OF DUTY 4 **89%**

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE 2 **82%**

SOF: PAYBACK **31%**

**W**HAT COMES TO mind when confronted by a 'value' product? Slightly watery baked beans, some of them oddly coloured. Toilet paper so thin that your fingers are in constant threat of breaking through and finding themselves in peril.

What doesn't come to mind, however, when dealing with 'value' through a product line such as 'Activision Value' is having to pass £29.99 over the counter to experience their wares. Since when was that value? I've effectively handed over £25 (I truthfully have, what with Activision refusing to send us a copy of the game) for a sloppily coded kick in the balls, and can only hope and pray that few others have fallen foul of this lazy hackjob that cashes in on the good name of the *Soldier of Fortune* series.

Coded in the heart of Slovakia rather than the original games' Raven offices in Wisconsin, Payback retreads old ground on a budget that's less shoe string and more

rotting Green Flash plimsolls held together with an elastic band. Initial reactions though are surprisingly positive – its early jungle levels and Bin Laden cave affairs are not only faintly graphically impressive but also fairly well-designed, but inevitably the game is deliberately front-loaded with its best offerings. Get a third of the way through the game and you're suddenly re-experiencing the worst excesses of late '90s shooters – like endless car park levels built solely of the same room copied and pasted again and again, or a whorehouse whose creators not only furnished it with a single, solitary (but very busy) prostitute and a 100 doors that don't open, but also modelled its design on a sprayed-out can of silly string.

## SHOCK AND GORE

And the gore? Well the advent of physics in *SOF's* absence means that a smile or two can be raised in combat as bodies are blasted into pieces, Middle-Eastern

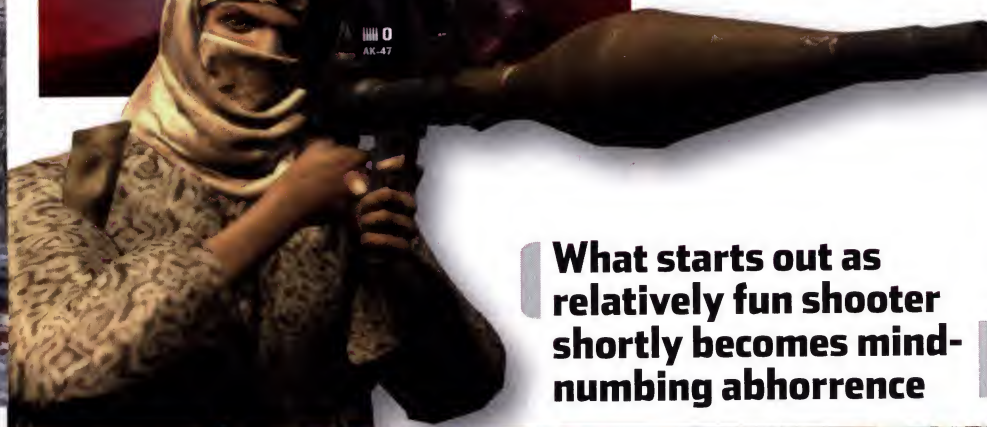
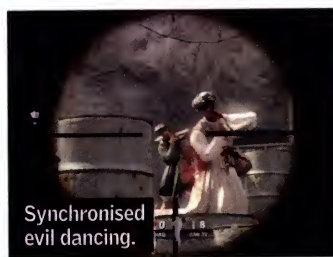
gentlemen clutch at their throats and misprogrammed lady bosses clutch at their absent genitalia when shot in the crotch. But if anything though the action and violence stuff is a step backwards from what was done in *SOF II* – with no throwing knives, no leaning, badly animated decapitations, disappearing corpses, no hollowing out of cranial matter, and an alarming tendency for limbs to get stuck in corridor furniture and gently revolve in a weakly accusatory manner. This is a diluted mess compared to that which contained within *SOF II's* GHOUL system in 2002, with only the shallow veneer of physics and a few extra blood splats to cover it up.

The action itself can be decent, the guns varied and genuinely fun to use, but the whole thing is fundamentally broken by glaring flaws that an increasingly alarmed toddler could have pointed out to the design team. Granting grunts and bosses one-hit kills makes later levels infuriating to play (not least when checkpoint placement is so shoddy) while the very concept of having a Big Bad at the close of each level who can suck up three minigun's worth of ammo fired directly into their heads before dying is utterly baffling.

What's more, you can add to this some desultory multiplayer (a four map shower of shit), a terribly implemented regenerating health system, graphics you can only adjust







## What starts out as relatively fun shooter shortly becomes mind-numbing abhorrence



## Getting all political...

Or how world peace and harmony was secured by bloodily killing 1,000 people who aren't American

John Mullins wasn't exactly a *Guardian*-reading activist or a regular viewer of *Newsnight Review*, but his murderous rampages in Iraq were at least slightly countered by virus-wielding Nazi types that lived in castles. Here, playing as a rubbish new soldier who looks like an angry boglin, it's all about the terrorism – with your character ranting and raving about the varied murdering terrorist bastards you come across (Muslim fundamentalists, Irish bombmakers and African warlords – one of whom is charmingly known as 'The Moor') before murdering every last one of them. By the end of the Afghan mission you can almost hear the distant strangled yelp of Donald Rumsfeld reaching climax.

I have few problems with games being based in real life conflicts or controversies, if they do it with at least a stab at class and sensitivity, but this blundering affair rankles since it's so obviously meant to lap gently at the cranial shores of a particular subset of American society that can't make any cultural differentiation apart from the one between 'us' and 'them'. Bad show.



by changing the resolution and some of most grunting, badly written and stultifyingly obnoxious in-ear mission banter ever committed to audio file.

### SHOCK AND GORE

With iffy politics that you'd think would hover around the right wing but actually land on the marker labelled 'pure bloody ignorance' (for a reference point take the helpful slaves, one of whom is simply called 'Helpful Slave', who practically grovel as you free them and present you with keycards)



what starts out as a relatively fun excursion in the most basic departments of the first-person shooter shortly becomes a mind-numbing abhorrence.

I honestly feel like I should donate money to charity having paid for such a nasty little swindle of a game. Ultimately, if you have the mentality of someone who sticks their nose beneath the duvet to smell particularly ripe farts then go right ahead: breathe it in. It's the stink of money made through terrifying mundanity, and it smells like... freedom. **PCZ**

## PCZONE

Graphics *COD2* standard – just  
Sound Decent blood  
spray SFX  
Multiplayer Really, really rubbish

- ✓ Basic shooter mechanics are functional
- ✓ First levels are just about okay
- ✗ Becomes a chore
- ✗ Difficulty levels, saves and health system broken
- ✗ Nasty minded and depressing

# 31

Fortune favours the lame





Even race drivers queue in London.



Part of the 2012 Olympics regeneration programme.

# JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

Will Porter gets his usual hot import nights through a Dutch mail order firm...

DEVELOPER THQ  
PUBLISHER THQ  
WEBSITE  
www.juiced2hin.com  
ETA Out now  
PRICE £34.99

**I**N ANY OTHER year a PC racing-lite enthusiast would be reading this review and being subjected to a list of reasons as to why the latest *Need For Speed* is far better. But that's now been thrown high up in the air what with *ProStreet* being an ill-conceived dog egg of a game. Surging into pole position then, in this almighty 'probably better played on console tbh' stand off, is *Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights*.

This is a curious amalgam of every console racer under the sun: with the pimped performance cars and jiggling ladies of a *Need for Speed*, the drifts of *Ridge Racer*, the focus on nitro and rival freak outs of a *Burnout*, and the real world locations (or at least strategic Big Ben placement) of a *Project Gotham*. And it's a competent game too – handling is of the 'simple, but hard to master' variety, tracks are well-designed and the difficulty level well pitched. So, *Juiced 2* is a right little magpie of a game, picking out bits from

other racers it fancies, but while the basic racing ticks the required boxes, little that it pinches works as well as it should. And the AI isn't too hot either.

## NOT HOT, NOT COOL

What's more *Hot Import Nights* holds itself in the same manner of a drunken dad at a wedding disco jiving to 'that *Umbrella* song they play on the radio'. It gets the sexy ladies on the loading screens right (not exactly tricky that one) – but whose idea was it to have you driving round London listening to *Voodoo People* by The Prodigy? An electro-punk classic it may be, but *Juiced 2*'s target audience were barely born when that song was out.

The game's stab at originality comes with a DNA system that keeps tabs on how you race so a carbon copy of your racing brain can be put into a friend's career mode – but it fails to realise that everyone plays this game in the same way: go fast, take corners well, don't crash.



She'll catch her death.

*Juiced 2* is an insecure game unsure of who wants to play it, but that's not to say it isn't fun. The races are challenging, hectic, and occasionally exhilarating, while the modding has enough flashy company logos to bamboozle the layman into believing it authentic. Beyond the go-faster stripes, though, there's little sense of ownership as such. So instead of putting forward this year's *NFS* as an alternative, just get last year's. **PCZ**

## AT A GLANCE...

A stab at youth culture that misses and hits an artery, but is still fun to drive.

**Minimum system requirements:**  
3GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

## HOW IT STACKS

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED 88%  
JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS 67%  
NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET 64%



I play as Miss Piggy wherever possible.



Mating race cars is dangerous.

## PCZONE

Graphics OK, a few glitches  
Sound Cars fine, voices get repetitive  
Multiplayer LIVE account needed  
✓ Fun racing, good learning curve  
✓ Better than *NFS: ProStreet*  
✗ Daft Driver DNA system  
✗ Copies lots, perfects absolutely nothing  
✗ Pretty damn generic in all honesty

# 67

Tepid Xbox-port days





Watching *My Parents Are Aliens* can have dire ramifications.

## CSI: CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION: HARD EVIDENCE

So that's *CSI*: *CSI: HE* for short, is it?

**DEVELOPER** Telltale Games  
**PUBLISHER** Ubisoft  
**WEBSITE** [csi.uk.ubi.com/hardevidence](http://csi.uk.ubi.com/hardevidence)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £19.99

**Min system req:**  
2.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM, and  
a 128MB graphics card.

**YOU DON'T HALF** meet some shady individuals in *CSI: CSI: Hard Evidence*. Unfortunately, you work with them. Your partner stands, arms crossed, watching as you scramble through someone's dustbin or (harrowingly) obtain a swab sample from a used condom. Beaten and broken, you ask for help. "Looking for a hint?" he offers, "Check your case file". Do so, and therein you'll discover the next four to five moves, meticulously laid out in black-and-white. "You're toying with me, you bastard," you mutter under your breath.

Crime scene investigation is one of those jobs that, much like reviewing PC point-and-click games in your underpants, sounds a lot sexier than it



The morgue. With smelly bodies.

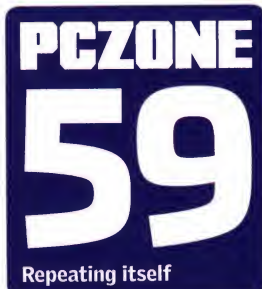
is, and herein lies *CSI: HE*'s tragic flaw. Detective work is a methodical, laborious task that requires a near-obsessive state of mind, which would explain why you spend much of your time in this game looking at shit under a microscope.

The job's other undesirable characteristic is that it's really bloody hard in real life, and the only answer Telltale Games can find for this dilemma is to hold your hand to a ridiculous degree during the course of your investigations. You're not really solving anything (the majority of the dialogue trees only have one branch, for example). You're a passenger, watching a crime solve itself – except you get to do all the donkey work.

Alex Dale



Here's your lab, and your gruff mentor.



There is no stand in HMV dedicated to this shit.

## DEAL OR NO DEAL: THE OFFICIAL PC GAME

Noel Edmonds' Louise Party

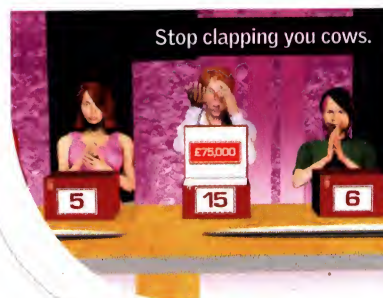
**DEVELOPER** Mindscape  
**PUBLISHER** Focus Media  
**WEBSITE** [www.focusmm.co.uk](http://www.focusmm.co.uk)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £19.99

**Min system req:**  
3GHz Processor, and 512MB RAM  
(XP) or 1GB RAM (Vista).

**UNTIL RECENTLY** we didn't think they made games like this anymore: monuments of lazy, cash-in shite that unfairly rip off the most stupid of consumers with their terrible existence.

Sadly, *Deal Or No Deal* very much exists, and to even touch it is to taste failure itself, having stewed in a cup of pissy tea for eight hours during the National "Screw You, PC Gamers" Festival of 2008.

The premise is identical to that of the TV programme: you choose a box, aiming to eliminate the surrounding boxes with amounts under the value you want. Occasionally the mysterious Banker will call you and offer you some piddly-arsed sum, to which you reply "deal" or "no deal".



Stop clapping you cows.

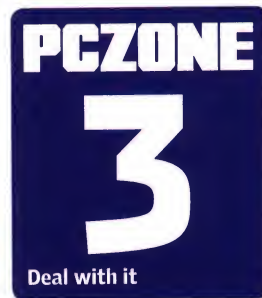


Living skulls.

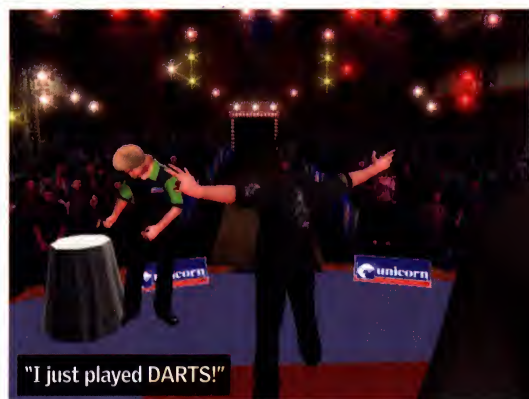
The goal is to make money, but the game itself is actually based wholly on chance. Despite what *Deal Or No Deal*'s lunkheaded contestants claim there is no secret strategy to winning the game – you are just picking random numbers. If that wasn't bad enough, the entire front-end is a lazy mixture of fugly semi-3D monsters and horribly coloured sets, with a strange stuttery-looking Noel Edmonds using the same five phrases to talk to you or the banker.

*Deal or No Deal* is a monstrosity – an unforgivable mess of arse-lint with less value than your average free flash game, as it has no real "game" to speak of beyond the arbitrary picking of boxes. Giving this piece of heinous excrement anything but a snide, cruel lambasting would be too generous.

Ed Zitron







# PDC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP DARTS 2008

*Jon Blyth* rolls around, gurgling, on the oche

**DEVELOPER** Mere Mortals  
**PUBLISHER** Oxygen Games  
**WEBSITE**  
[www.oxygengames.net](http://www.oxygengames.net)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

**BEFORE YOU BUY** *PDC World Championship Darts 2008* – as you, me, and the rest of the sane world will inevitably run out and do – let's go through a couple of practice rounds. It's OK, you don't need the game for these exercises.

First, find an icon on your PC's desktop. The recycle bin will do. Move your cursor until it's over whatever icon you choose, click on it, then drag the icon down. Move it steadily, being careful not to veer to either side, and once you reach a point you've previously agreed with yourself, move the mouse back up again. Don't let go of the mouse button! You're dragging the recycle bin back up.

You have just thrown your first dart, and you're well on your way to mastering the single skill involved in *PDC Darts 2008*, the darts league that doesn't have Andy 'The Viking' Fordham, but don't get complacent: you're going to have to use

this skill hundreds of times if you're going to climb your way to the top of the career ladder. And sometimes you'll have to move your mouse down slightly further than others – there really is no time to relax.

## JUST LACKING FUN

But don't worry about that now! You can use your new-found ability to move your mouse up and down in a series of literally incredible party games – all of which require you to point at slightly different areas before pressing the left mouse button, moving your mouse steadily down, and slightly up again. And watch out!

There are three difficulty settings, making this perhaps the most comprehensive Down Then Up Simulator since *Tiger Woods*. But imagine all the excitement of *Tiger Woods*, condensed onto a stage, one club, and an ever-unchanging course, and played by one of the eight unhealthy-looking character

models open to you on the pitiful character creation screen!

If *PDC World Championship Darts 2008* has one problem, it's that last year's predecessor nailed this rudimentary motor function, which was made obsolete by every mouse-operated interface. You can use a joystick if you want, but even the novelty of a Wii Remote couldn't save this ugly, gameless drill. **PCZ**

## AT A GLANCE...

This is a darts mini-game. It's idiotic to pay full whack for a mini-game.

**Minimum system requirements:**  
 This game could run on a calculator. But you'll need DirectX 9 somewhere on your PC to be safe.

## HOW IT STACKS

**PDC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2007** 39%  
**WINMAU WORLD DARTS II** 38%  
**PDC WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP** 34%



## PCZONE

Graphics Antialiasing wouldn't have hurt  
 Sound One Hundred And Piss Off  
 Multiplayer Share a mouse

- ✓ Down motion tracks well
- ✓ Impeccable clicking
- ✗ Up motion lacking
- ✗ Less fun than play-by-email dominoes
- ✗ Upsetting in concept
- ✗ Requires absolutely no skill

**34**  
 Bad arrows



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The massed... well, squads of mutants and humans face off.

## SUNAGE

### An incompetent truth

**DEVELOPER** Vertex4  
**PUBLISHER** Lighthouse Interactive  
**WEBSITE** [www.sunage-the-game.com](http://www.sunage-the-game.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £19.99

#### Min system req:

1.2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

**W**HAT WITH ALL the fuss over global warming, it wasn't long before the world's greatest thinkers got their teeth sunk into our impending doom.

First Kevin Costner with *Waterworld*, then Al Gore with his sagely wagged finger during a two-hour PowerPoint presentation, and now *SunAge*: a bleak view of the future shoehorned into a decrepit seven year-old RTS, which lets you take control of one of three factions: mutants, humans and robots.

The former two are fighting for superiority on a radiation-ravaged Earth. Then, in a classic moment of human idiocy, the humans discover a gateway to a new planet that is just right for continuing the race – but when they jump through, it's full of angry robots. No!

The game itself is a mess of mindless RTS garbage. The graphics



are a bland, sub-*Red Alert 2* affair, but the gameplay falls further into the depths of mediocrity. The UI is clunky, travelling into the past with some kind of horrible mishmash of *Total Annihilation* and the original *Command & Conquer*. Controlling your army is worse still, forcing you to select only a few troops at a time, moving them in separate groups. The icing on the cake is the abomination of AI that requires your troops to be in range to attack – don't try and click on an enemy to have your troops move into range – it won't happen.

*SunAge* is a terrible RTS, lacking definition, originality, or fun, wrapped in a half-arsed story. Don't even think about it.

Ed Zitron



"When I go to university, they're going to shoot you."

## MY HORSE & ME

### Step away from the pony

**DEVELOPER** Mistic  
**PUBLISHER** Atari  
**WEBSITE** [www.atari.com/myhorseandme](http://www.atari.com/myhorseandme)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £19.99

#### Min system req:

1.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 64MB graphics card.

**T**HERE IS SOMETHING truly manly about riding a horse – regardless of the distinctive stiff-lipped pinkness of anything horse-related. From valiant charges into the jaws of hell to Arnie in *True Lies*, we all know that, deep down, true men ride horses. So it's perfectly fine for me to be playing *My Horse and Me*, a game in which you spend time grooming, polishing, buffing and rubbing your horse, as well as riding him or her around horse competitions, as well as a selection of bizarre minigames.

Controlling the horse is a rather troublesome thing on the keyboard, and there's no option to use a gamepad. Using the traditional arrow keys to turn and control the speed of your steed, you have to force him to leap over things, turn, and then turn again before jumping over a barrier.

That's the lot of the game – battling your equine vehicle and the speed at which it conquers jumps. If you so wish, you can also chase butterflies, spot the difference, clean your horse, or even ride in ever-decreasing and ever-more despairing circles.

The choice is yours – if you love horses to the point that you cannot be sated by buying a mount in *World of Warcraft*, then it may be necessary to own *My Horse & Me*. If not, then there's little that you cannot recreate here in your own time jumping over stray cats and bins.

Ed Zitron



**PCZONE**  
**25**  
Global Warning



**PCZONE**  
**35**  
Hoarse



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has been sanitised...

## THE GOLDEN COMPASS

Great book. Iffy film. Game from hell

**DEVELOPER** Shiny Entertainment  
**PUBLISHER** SEGA  
**WEBSITE** [www.sega.com/gamesite/goldencompass](http://www.sega.com/gamesite/goldencompass)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

**Min system req:**  
2.2GHz processor, 512MB RAM  
and a 128MB graphics card.



You'll never make cheerleader!

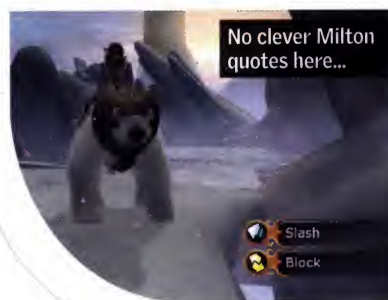
**WARREN SPECTOR** RECENTLY claimed that he would have loved to have worked on games set within Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* universe. This, frankly, would have been amazing – the books fit him like a glove. Their themes of alternate parallel universes, their steampunk mentality, the weighty references to works of literature, their hive of moral ambiguity, and the homosexual angels would have been right up his street. This game could have been a legendary RPG, and it wouldn't have shyed away from the religion-prodding either.

However, because life is depressing and overrated what we've ended up with this horrible, bastardised mess of a game. A game that is not only shoddy in its

platforming and incessant mini-games that help Lyra to deceive her elders, but also frequently gets the world in which the game is set completely wrong. I realise I'm being a pedant here, but characters are frequently seen without their daemons (a notion that breaks the entire fabric of the storyline), while a bare-bones script often flares up with glaring inaccuracies to anyone with a working knowledge of the books.

This isn't just a severe case of nerd outrage though, this is a distinctly shoddy game – iffy controls, rubbish bear fights, dull levels and gameplay obsessed with balancing, jumping and the most inane rhythm action ever devised. Why do kiddie games have to be this bad? It's a waste of space. I'm sad I even had to write about it.

Will Porter



No clever Milton  
quotes here...

**PCZONE**  
**23**  
Northern shites



ask  
about  
games  
.com







Aviation support  
is a new feature.

## SUDDEN STRIKE 3: ARMS FOR VICTORY

WWII: the war that just keeps giving

**DEVELOPER** Empire Interactive  
**PUBLISHER** Fireglow  
**WEBSITE** [www.suddenstrike.com](http://www.suddenstrike.com)  
**ETA** Out now  
**PRICE** £29.99

### Min system req:

2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and  
a 128MB graphics card.



Those huge placards  
say "Nazis are here!"

**I** LIKE RTS games, because they force me to read the game manual. It's nostalgic in an inconvenient way, like how you can only buy Alphabites from a Happy Shopper in the middle of Pembrokeshire. But accessibility has rarely been a problem with Fireglow's *Sudden Strike* series. The original game was a surprise hit eight years ago due to its minimalistic approach, which remains true with this update.

Upon hitting enemy soil, *Sudden Strike 3* doesn't force you to dig up arbitrary minerals or ask to you open a lemonade stand so your troops don't die of dehydration. You'll have to refuel and restock your tanks, and maybe repair the odd bridge, but that's largely it. This leaves you free to

concentrate on organising your troops. Mobilising them can prove more cumbersome as many of the maps are enormous by RTS standards, but to offset this you can assign default behaviour characteristics to a platoon (fire at will, tread cautiously, et al), allowing you to turn your attentions elsewhere without having to baby-sit them from above.

The level design appears to be somewhat lacklustre (there's too much 'take this point! And now this one!'), but it's still an enjoyable romp. Regardless, it suffers compared to something like *Company of Heroes*, and although the updated graphics engine goes some way to bridging the gap, why do you need a PC powerful enough to overthrow Poland to run it?

Alex Dale



SS3 is all based on events  
that really happened.

**PCZONE**  
**67**  
Three strikes! You're out

# 2 GREAT GAMES IN ONE!

COMING TOGETHER WITHIN  
MEDIEVAL II:  
TOTAL WAR GOLD EDITION



AVAILABLE  
FEBRUARY 2008  
[WWW.TOTALWAR.COM](http://WWW.TOTALWAR.COM)



**SEGA**  
[www.sega.co.uk](http://www.sega.co.uk)

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You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

# indiezone



**Martin Korda** dances a jig to celebrate this month's independent gaming bonanza

## AQUARIA

DEVELOPER Bit Blot WEBSITE [www.bit-blot.com/aquaria](http://www.bit-blot.com/aquaria) PRICE \$30 (£15)

**WINNER OF THE** Seumas McNally grand prize at this year's Independent Games Festival, *Aquaria* is an adventure game crafted with genuine imagination and originality.

You play Naija, a lonely underwater dweller desperately searching for her family. Packed with exploration and combat, *Aquaria* also features an array of

innovative ideas, most notably the ability to sing tunes to cast spells.

In a throwback to legendary adventure game *Loom*, each incantation has a corresponding song that must be played (by dragging your mouse over the correct notes) for it to be activated.

*Aquaria* just oozes quality. As you delve deeper towards the ocean floor, you'll encounter increasingly hostile and challenging enemies, most notably in the eeriest and darkest depths of the sea. Some searing action sequences perfectly break up the more sedate exploration sequences, while an adept soundtrack, and quality voice acting accompany locations that teem with loads of fish and plant life.



Introducing the incomparable... Finley!

INDIE ZONE  
GAME  
OF THE  
MONTH

PCZONE  
85



Every location is full of life.



Tower positioning is everything.

## WICKED DEFENSE

DEVELOPER Ixchel Studios WEBSITE [www.wicked-defense.com](http://www.wicked-defense.com) PRICE £5.27

**AFTER ATTACK OF the Creeps** (Issue 189, 38%) made such a hog's lughole of tower defence-style gameplay, it's great to find the genre back on form here. Opting for an unconventional graphical style, *Wicked Defense* tasks you with lining a course with

various upgradeable turrets in order to prevent a group of attackers from reaching a set destination.

The wide collection of towers includes gravitational weapons that decelerate enemies, disruptors that make foes more vulnerable and a wide collection of crippling attack turrets. You can also call upon specific attacks ranging from meteor strikes to ion cannon blasts.

Thanks to the upgradeable towers and the changing routes enemies take, *Wicked Defense* possesses an impressive longevity that belies its meagre price.

The visuals are unorthodox but effective.



PCZONE  
79



# MUTANT

DEVELOPER Napoleon Games WEBSITE [www.napoleongames.cz](http://www.napoleongames.cz) PRICE \$1995 (£10)

**MUTANT INJECTS THE** often overly predictable action/blaster genre with a tinge of originality. You play as the eponymous Mutant, who finds himself in a city (Prague) overrun by extra-terrestrial killers. Having been subjected to secret genetic experiments since you were a child (after being sold to government scientists for a fistful of coins by your heartless grandmother), you've grown four arms and developed skills to aid your bid for survival.

With each hand clutching a separate weapon, the aiming mechanics certainly take some getting used to, though once

you've grasped the basics it's not long before you're simultaneously taking down several enemies at a time. Some excellent physics perfectly complement the top quality visuals and manipulating your surroundings (including trucks and cars) is a blast, especially when you hurl them at your foes.

*Mutant* is one of the toughest indie action blasters we've come across (with ammo and health in short supply and plenty of enemies) but the flashes of innovation ensure that it's one of the deepest.

PCZONE  
77



# JOYSTICK JOHNNY

DEVELOPER Flea Circus Games WEBSITE [www.joystickjohnny.com](http://www.joystickjohnny.com) PRICE \$1995 (£10)



**SIMILAR IN ITS** approach to *Arcadia Remix* (Issue 187, 72%), *Joystick Johnny* houses a collection of arcade classics under one roof. The twist here is to play through a selection of these games within a set time limit in order to track down and eliminate a video virus. However, make a mistake and you'll incur a 10 second penalty, meaning you need to learn to play flawlessly if you're to beat the unforgiving time limit.

The collection of games is impressive, each proving to be a slightly new skew of the classics you used to play down the arcade for 10p a pop.

The selection includes *Hogger* (like *Frogger* only with a pig), *Pizzaroids* (like *Asteroids* only with pieces of pizza) and *Shape Invaders*, (like *Space Invaders*... I think you get the idea).

While there's a dearth of originality, it's still a real joy to revisit the games of yore, while the quick fire gameplay provides little scope for boredom.

If you're looking for a shot of nostalgia to get you through the winter nights, then *Joystick Johnny* is just the tonic.

PCZONE  
68

## TOP 5 INDIE SPORTS GAMES



### NEW STAR SOCCER 3

[www.newstarsoccer.com](http://www.newstarsoccer.com)  
Reviewed Issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensible Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal!* (the film) to provide the most complete Indie gaming footy experience currently available. Featuring 40 world-class teams; rainy, muddy and snowy conditions; and training obstacles to overcome, *New Star Soccer 3* makes a superb footie sim.



### STOKED RIDER: ALASKA ALIEN

[www.stokedrider.com](http://www.stokedrider.com)  
Reviewed Issue 180

A superb snowboarding sim that features some of the most realistic physics we've ever seen in an Indie game.



### MINIGOLF MANIA

[www.topm.com](http://www.topm.com)  
Reviewed Issue 179

Every bit as fun as having your face lashed by sea spray while attempting to time a perfect shot through a rotating windmill on a hot day.



### TENNIS ELBOW

[managames.com/tennis](http://managames.com/tennis)  
Reviewed Issue 163

Despite the lack of visual appeal, this tennis sim features six court surfaces, 125 tournaments, and 300 AI opponents.



### REACH

[www.mdickie.com](http://www.mdickie.com)  
Reviewed Issue 189

Train up an obscure boxer, find a manager and arrange fights in order to work your way up the ranking ladder. The bouts are a hoot.



# BUDGET

When Ed Zitron swings his sword, all prices are choppable

BUDGET  
GAME  
OF THE  
MONTH

## THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PUBLISHER: Bethesda WEBSITE: [www.direct2drive.co.uk](http://www.direct2drive.co.uk) PRICE: £14.95

**IF YOU HAVEN'T** picked up and taken *Oblivion* into your life, then there's a chance it may be because it was too much money: but fear no more, as you can now nab arguably one of gaming's finest RPGs for just over a month's *WOW* subscription.

For the uninitiated, you set out on an adventure across the world of Cyrodill seeking the son of the murdered emperor Uriel Septim VII. However, the storyline only scratches the surface of this deep, beautiful game, with too many side quests to adequately list. There's

over 100 hours of gameplay, with more should you buy *Shivering Isles*. Even by itself, *Oblivion* is close to the best value-for-money on the budget circuit: a fulfilling, epic fantasy romp, that lets you take everything at your own pace, whether you're harvesting Nirnfoot or battling daedric princes.

The levelling system is strange, as everything levels up on par with you, but you should certainly get used to it as *Oblivion* is absolutely brilliant.

PCZONE  
93



Can I borrow a feeling?



Born free, as free as the wind blows...



Gurk started arrow swallowing before swords. But he still died.



Goblin Skirmisher

**THIS MONTH**  
**PCZONE**  
SAVED MONEY BY...

Log bought a slightly cheaper brand of pie  
Saving: 20p



Steve got Ed's spare sound card to use with his 5.1 speaker setup  
Saving: £35



Jamie had a leaving do, where everyone bought him drinks  
Saving: £15



## PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

PUBLISHER: Midway WEBSITE: [www.midway.com](http://www.midway.com) PRICE: £9.99

**I'VE ALWAYS DREAMED** of having psychic powers and abusing them to the detriment of others, so *Psi-Ops* is a welcome outlet for this psychotic urge.

Using the Havok physics engine and combining it with a fair dose of telekinetic japery, you can have a great deal of fun ploughing through ragdoll terrorists.

*Psi-Ops* is a reasonably fun spin on the third-person action genre, and it's a pleasant diversion at the price. At times it lacks atmosphere and is a little repetitive, but has some replay value in that there's a different ways to deal with each situation, though most come down to how to kill a man without being killed yourself.

Physics puzzling and killing are now common in gaming, but *Psi-Ops* has a few tricks that haven't yet been topped.

PCZONE  
72



It's a psychobilly freakout!



Don't go into the light, Steve!



Hoverboots are all the rage.



# BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft WEBSITE: [www.blazing-angels.com](http://www.blazing-angels.com) PRICE: £9.99

**WE MAY BE** bored stiff of RTS and FPS games dealing with World War II, but as far as flying games go they've ranged from over-technical to underwhelming. *Blazing Angels* breaks the cycle by taking the genuine feel of World War II dogfighting with the brisk arcade controls of the Xbox's *Crimson Skies*.

The result is a pleasing yet not astounding World War II arcade plane game in which you fight the Axis over the various locales of the war, fighting for our freedoms in your own special way. It's enjoyable enough, but lacks the killer tight controls that made *Crimson Skies* such a rip-roaring success.

**PCZONE**  
**68**

A whisky, a tango,  
a walnut-whip...



Licorice – the most  
secretive weapon.

# THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS GOLD EDITION

PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE: [www.settlers.com](http://www.settlers.com) PRICE £9.99

**WHILE THE SETTLERS** has become the most serious of business, losing the humour that it was once so renowned for, it has retained its quirky, resource-driven antics.

The problem is that this has gone exactly nowhere in the space between the first game and this *Gold Edition*, including

both *Heritage of Kings* and the equally dull expansion for a low, low price. The difference sadly isn't that great, with the status of the game changing from "dull, boring, full-price game" to "dull, boring, cheaper, but still dull."

*The Settlers*: they can't be bargained with. They can't be reasoned with. They

do not feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And they absolutely will not stop, ever, until we are dead. Beware them like you would a terrible disease, a man who smells of urine, or a cat with five heads that sings Robert Goulet songs in a shrill tone.

**PCZONE**  
**42**



## And the rest...

Five hundred cola bottles, or one of these bargains...



**SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW**  
£5, REVIVAL

Regardless of whether you've played the later games, Pandora Tomorrow is still a great gadget-laden terrorist stopper. While neither as proficient as Fisher's first outing, nor as technical as his later hits, it's well worth a play.

**PCZONE**  
**80**



**WARHAMMER 40,000: FIRE WARRIOR**  
£5, REVIVAL

Sadly rendered irrelevant through crap controls and dull level design, Fire Warrior's deeply mediocre core remains covered by the strong Warhammer 40,000 IP, which adds a decent atmosphere. If only the game had lived up to it.

**PCZONE**  
**53**



**BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30**  
£5, REVIVAL

This "authentic World War II shooter" is based on genuine historic data, and while not changing the genre in staggering ways does what it needs to do very well. If you simply can't get enough of the Second World War, buy this.

**PCZONE**  
**70**

## PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



**1 HALF-LIFE 2**  
\$19.95 (£10), STEAM

Do we really need to explain why you need Gordon's physics-based outing? For a tenner? OK then, it's PC gaming at its finest. Happy now?



**2 FAR CRY**  
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI. Formerly the only real rival to the FPS dominance of *Half-Life 2*.



**3 COMPANY OF HEROES**  
\$29.95 (£15), STEAM

Relic's title made the World War II RTS into an enjoyable genre again, with an excellent campaign and taut, tactical gameplay.



**4 THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND**  
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

The precursor to *Oblivion*, Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG offers cheap goblin bashing.



**5 PSYCHONAUTS**  
\$19.95 (£9.99), STEAM

Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this title into the stratosphere of the platforming greats.



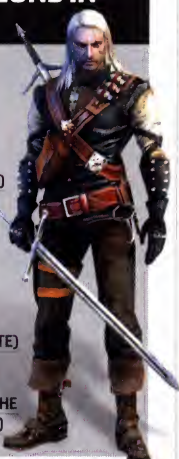
# BUYER'S GUIDE

The greatest games that money can be frittered away on...



## PCZONE TOP 5 CURMUDGEONS IN PC GAMES

- 1 **HORNY**  
(DUNGEON KEEPER)
- 2 **GERALT**  
(THE WITCHER)
- 3 **MARCUS FENIX**  
(GEARS OF WAR)
- 4 **XAN**  
(BALDUR'S GATE)
- 5 **BASTILA**  
(KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC)



## PCZONE TOP 5 CONTROVERSIAL PC GAMES

- 1 **POSTAL**
- 2 **DOOM**
- 3 **GRAND THEFT AUTO**
- 4 **WOLFENSTEIN 3D**
- 5 **CARMAGEDDON**



## PCZONE TOP 5 EXPANSION PACKS (according to Ed)

- 1 **TOTAL ANNIHILATION: THE CORE CONTINGENCY**
- 2 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE**
- 3 **OBLIVION: THE SHIVERING ISLES**
- 4 **HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE 1**
- 5 **THE MOVIES: STUNTS AND EFFECTS**



## FPS

Must buy!



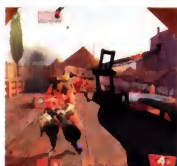
**HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES**  
PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in – but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



**BIOSHOCK**  
PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%

The spiritual sequel to *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.



**TEAM FORTRESS 2**  
PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%

Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together everything that's good about online shooters and topping it all off with some superb animation to rival Pixar's films.



**UNREAL TOURNAMENT III**  
PCZ Issue: 189 – 90%

The daddy of online shooters returns with a mule-kick of intense deathmatch, epic vehicles, high-speed combat, Warfare mode, and a graphical sheen that outdoes its ageing insta-gib rivals.



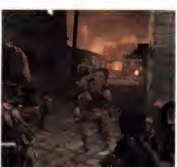
**BATTLEFIELD 2**  
PCZ Issue: 157 – 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the ability to zap people with medic shock pads.



**CRYSIS**  
PCZ Issue: 188 – 92%

A retooled, condensed *Far Cry* for newer hardware, with *Crysis*'s neat nanosuit and 'anything can happen' action-bubble mentality making it a winner. The last act falters, but the Korean-bullying is endlessly replayable.



**CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE**  
PCZ Issue: 188 – 89%

Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.

## Strategy

Must buy!



**COMPANY OF HEROES**  
PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%

The fact that despite hailing from that most overpopulated of genres, the WWII RTS, *Company of Heroes* is still number one is a testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good.



**WORLD IN CONFLICT**  
PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%

A stunning RTS set at the height of the cold war, *World in Conflict* offers genuinely innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've ever likely to see.



**CIVILIZATION IV**  
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place indeed, and the latest version is the greatest yet. It's now available with added warmongering and diplomacy thanks to the expansion packs.



**MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**  
PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Now complemented by the excellent *Kingdoms* expansion.



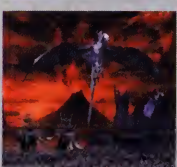
**RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS**  
PCZ Issue: 168 – 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



**SUPREME COMMANDER**  
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%

Massive battles and armies composed of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most unique RTS titles around? Check, check and check.



**LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH**  
PCZ Issue: 149 – 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the genre-dominating *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balg around for guaranteed strategy fun.

## Action/Adventure

Must buy!



**GEARS OF WAR**  
PCZ Issue: 188 – 90%

Who knew the all-conquering console title would work so well with a mouse and keyboard? *GOW*'s skirmishes against the aggressive Locust Horde are enjoyably tactical, while its cover system and difficulty level combine to make you genuinely fear the bullets flying around you. With the battle against the almighty Brumak near the game's close, the PC has the best version of an already excellent shooter. So hooray for us.



**MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE**  
PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%

A bit frayed around the edges now, but it still shows how to do bullet-time right. A noirish tone, a growling voice-over and remarkably evergreen gun action mean that Payne is still a force to contend with.



**GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS**  
PCZ Issue: 155 – 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this – a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious – *San Andreas* is the pinnacle of gaming achievement.



**SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY**  
PCZ Issue: 154 – 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



**FAHRENHEIT: INDI MOON**  
PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. Boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



**PSYCHONAUTS**  
PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



**BEYOND GOOD & EVIL**  
PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



## MMOs



**MUST BUY!**  
**WORLD OF WARCRAFT**  
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%  
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



**LOTR ONLINE**  
PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%  
A near-perfect representation of Tolkien's stories, with solid combat and engaging plots, all bound up in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! The whole of Middle-earth awaits...



**EVERQUEST II**  
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%  
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original game a much-needed lick of paint, and adds a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A timesink in a good way.



**GUILD WARS**  
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%  
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. A lot of polish and thought have been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



**EVE ONLINE**  
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%  
*Elite* online has been a long-held fantasy, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy - it's up to you.

## Simulation



**BUDGET**  
**X2: REUNION**  
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%  
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot.



**IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES**  
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%  
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



**MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X**  
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%  
This latest iteration in the *Microsoft Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



**BUDGET**  
**FREELANCER**  
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%  
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



**SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC**  
PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%  
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

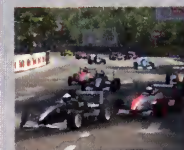
## Driving/Racing



**MUST BUY!**  
**GTR2**  
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%  
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



**GT LEGENDS**  
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%  
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging 60s never ended.



**LIVE FOR SPEED**  
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%  
Online racing at its best. *LFS* offers realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers, that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



**COLIN MCRAE: DIRT**  
PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%  
The rallying legend returns, and this time he treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC so far.



**NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED**  
PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%  
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping, though.

## Oddball



**PORTAL**  
PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%  
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but games are rarely more delightful.



**GARRY'S MOD**  
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%  
The god game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGS. Try it out and see for yourself.



**VIVA PIÑATA**  
PCZ Issue: 190 - 85%  
Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, *Viva Piñata* looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising game. Don't be put off by the kiddy graphics - it's a keeper.



**PEGGLE DELUXE**  
PCZ Issue: 183 - 83%  
A weeping unicorn and a sequence of bagatelle-inspired peg-bouncing puzzles combine to make a casual game of unparalleled addictiveness. If you doubt us, you haven't played it.



**THE MOVIES**  
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%  
Life as a movie mogul - games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.

## Sport



**MUST BUY!**  
**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2008**  
PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%  
The latest version of the 'still playing at 3am' title is all about noob-attraction and an improved interface. As usual, *FM* succeeds, and is the best management sim on earth.



**PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008**  
PCZ Issue: 188 - 87%  
Still in a different league to *FIFA*, *PES* lacks the official stamp but offers amazingly lifelike football. Whether it's end-to-end stuff or a nil-nil slog, it's always compelling.



**TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06**  
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%  
Not the most recent version, but still our favourite, *Tiger 06* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



**FIFA 08**  
PCZ Issue: 188 - 80%  
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.



**NHL 08**  
PCZ Issue: 187 - 80%  
Bringing the American sport we 'get' (it's like *Speedball!*) to our PCs, the latest *NHL* is chock-full of large Canadians knocking seven bells out of each other. Exciting, fast, smooth and exhilarating.

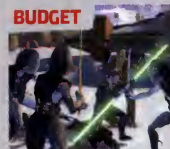
## Role-playing games



**MUST BUY!**  
**THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**  
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%  
*Oblivion*'s sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



**THE WITCHER**  
PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%  
Adult and intelligent (if a mite sexist), the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With moral bite and an epic story, this has come out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



**BUDGET**  
**KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC**  
PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%  
*KOTOR* is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



**BUDGET**  
**THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND**  
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%  
Quite possibly the most intimidating yet wonderful game we've ever played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



**BUDGET**  
**DEUS EX**  
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%  
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the gaming world.

## INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

### February

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR  
THE CLUB  
TUROK

THQ  
SEGA  
DISNEY/TOUCHSTONE

### March

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES  
ALONE IN THE DARK  
BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY  
COMMAND & CONQUER 3: KANE'S WRATH  
LOST: THE VIDEO GAME  
RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2  
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR - SOULSTORM

EIDOS  
ATARI  
UBISOFT  
EA  
UBISOFT  
UBISOFT  
THQ

### Q2 2008

FAR CRY 2  
SPACE SIEGE  
STALKER: CLEAR SKY

UBISOFT  
SEGA  
TBA

### Q3 2008

BORDERLANDS  
FALLOUT 3  
LEFT 4 DEAD  
PROJECT ORIGIN

2K GAMES  
BETHESDA  
VALVE  
WARNER BROTHERS

### TBC

ASSASSIN'S CREED  
DRAGON AGE  
OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING  
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION  
SPORE  
STARCRRAFT II  
WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

UBISOFT  
EA  
CODEMASTERS  
UBISOFT  
EA  
VIVENDI  
GOA/EA





# XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

DEFINITIVE REVIEW!

## BURNOUT Paradise

Speed! Stunts! Carnage!



ON SALE NOW!

PLUS

10 games to play today!  
Exclusive hands-on previews  
How to eat for victory  
Why you need surround sound







PCZONE

# HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

## Poker scum

**A** FRIEND OF mine rents a server each month, using it for web development and hosting of the odd game. He knows nothing about security, and for months I'd been expecting a panicked call asking where all his files went.

This morning the phone goes. He tells me someone has broken into his machine and used it for poker, could I help. I said I thought I'd misheard because it sounded like he said 'for poker'. But, yes, he said poker.

Apparently, someone had used the machine's admin password to log in, download a poker application, and had then spent the night playing Texas Hold 'Em online. After that, the unknown miscreant logs out and is never seen again.

I had to see the logs. Quite often, hackers will switch from parasite to pathogen when discovered, trashing the PC and leaving you praying your backups work. But as far as I could make out, poker man had left the place in the same condition he'd found it, meaning he'd be back to play again; probably with the same stolen credit card as last time.

In these instances you have to copy all your data, close all web and FTP services, toughen firewall rules, rename the administrator account and disable all the others. Ask your host for a new IP and then wait to be beaten about the head for choosing an admin password that matches all your forum passwords.

*Wand*

Phil Wand, hardware editor

## OFF TO CLOUD NINE

### GeForce 9800 takes SLI to new heights



Will another SLI-based card be another crash landing for NVIDIA?

**THINK THE 8800 Ultra** is stupid expensive? Meet the GeForce 9800 GX2, essentially a single product with two 8800 boards inside strapped together in SLI configuration.

NVIDIA claim the GX2 will be one third as fast again as the current Ultra, and will support SLI configurations itself to give quad GPU power to those of you with deep pockets.

Like the 7950 GX2, the new flagship will require driver support for you to get full benefit of all those processors, and given that the old card was something of a train wreck on the sales charts, its replacement needs to be far better supported in order to survive.

The new 9800 GTX replaces the existing card, supports three-way SLI and should

give performance to rival the current Ultra. Soon after we'll see the 9800 GT appear, knocking aside everyone's favourite 8800 GT and hopefully giving gamers a higher frame rate for the same money.

The only problem is that the 9-Series line-up is essentially a tweaking of 8-Series products we first saw back in November 2006 (which is ancient history in PC hardware terms).

Given that the GPU market is driven by who's fastest, NVIDIA won't be in any particular hurry to change anything. After all, if their chipset isn't broke, what's the point in going all out trying to fix it and make it even more speedier? [nvidia.com](http://nvidia.com)

## AMD DOUBLES UP

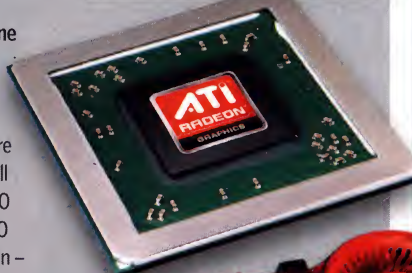
### Are they serious?

Two RV670s make every R680.

**THE RADEON HD 3870 X2** – a two-engine card using the same approach as the GX2 – is one AMD's new products that they hope will put them back on top.

The fat Raddy can be put into CrossFire for quad GPU power. But the ATI card will only match the power of the current 8800 Ultra, so that NVIDIA's forthcoming 9800 GTX – a single slot, single processor design – will make more sense to most gamers.

To reclaim their crown, ATI need to release their next graphics engine, the R700. We know very little except it's due soon and must beat NVIDIA. [ati.com](http://ati.com)



Red means 'brimming with power' in ATI speak.

## NEWS ROUND-UP

Bill Gates has been boasting how Microsoft has shifted "100 million copies" of *Vista* since the operating system's launch in January 2007. What he didn't say was that little more than a third of all new PCs carried the operating system in 2007, making it nowhere near as successful as *XP* in its first year out. So it's not just me then. [informationweek.com](http://informationweek.com)

Westinghouse were demonstrating their wireless HDTVs at the CES show in Las Vegas, allowing owners of Media Center PCs to relocate them behind cupboard doors and stream information over the air.

Add wireless USB and it looks like we'll get tidy houses again. And probably various forms of radiowave-induced cancer. [westinghousedigital.com](http://westinghousedigital.com)

**WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS**

BY ED ZITRON

**LACHESIS:** The medical term for a coma brought on through the overconsumption of Roquefort cheese. **MUSICAL:** In a failed experiment in which Jules Holland attempted to extend his already century-long life, he accidentally created a tiny immortal clone of himself that made disparaging comments about his every song. This tiny curmudgeon was ironically dubbed Musical. **GEFORCE:** The most short-lived gladiator, GeForce's signature move was to inhale seven litres of helium, spin in eccentric circles, and shout "awooga!" in a squeaky Dutch accent. **VNC:** A constantly changing abbreviation that has variously stood for Very Naughty Cuddles, Victor's Not Coming, and Vicious Nipple Clamp. Currently it stands for Vrooom, Nice Car.



## COLOUR VISION

Philips already have a range of Ambilight LCD TVs which emit light from all four sides and also the bezel. Here the technology makes more sense. Most flatpanel TVs live against walls or in a corner, and movies are able to offer a rich cinematic experience that with only a few exceptions is absent from computer screens. The day Francis Ford Coppola or David Lynch start directing games, it might all come good.



# AMBIX PREMIUM KIT

PRICE £239 MANUFACTURER Philips WEBSITE [philips.com/ambx](http://philips.com/ambx)

**T**HOSE OF YOU with an *Innovations* catalogue next to your toilet should be familiar with the idea of 'mood lamps' and 'ambient colour projectors'. Supposedly these are capable of producing visual effects to rival ELO gigs from the '70s, but nobody ever buys them because they're obviously rubbish.

The £239 Philips amBX Premium Kit promises the same sort of technoglitterball experience, only synchronised with your games and helped along by a 2.1 speaker system, two fans and a device that vibrates your wrist.

The main 'wall washer' unit sits behind your monitor, connects to your PC by the supplied USB cable, and in addition to splashing light about the place acts as a hub for all the fans, speakers and the wrist rumbler. There's an audio cable that runs from your hardware's line-out to the subwoofer, and both the wall washer and sub require separate 240V power.

On a page in the *Innovations* catalogue, pictured without the bird's nest of wires that makes it all work, this would seem like the height of awesome. You can imagine hunkering down to play *DEFCON* or *Supreme Commander* (the former comes bundled in every Premium Kit) with amBX painting a Mardi Gras of vibrant colours over walls and ceiling before exploding in a thundering climax of shocking white light and blasts of air when nukes hit home.

## LIGHT (NOT) FANTASTIC

The reality is that it's rather hit-and-miss. The speakers and subwoofer do a fine job, but the rest of it – the actual nuts and bolts of amBX – have little noticeable effect unless you're playing a compatible title in a dark room with the lamps positioned no more than two feet from a blank wall. That simply wasn't possible at the office, nor at home where my PCs are in the middle of the room and back onto one another, so I had to spend half an hour re-arranging tables only

**Adds a missing dimension to slow-paced and atmospheric titles that you'd play in a dark room anyway**

to discover that people complain when you draw blinds and turn off lights in the middle of the day.

The wrist rumbler is also an annoyance, vibrating your hands for no reason I could fathom, and causing pens, batteries, screws and other loose items to shimmy their way onto the floor. It also bounces about itself when you're not resting on it, such as when using a wheel to play driving games.

When the conditions are just right, the amBX system works surprisingly well. Alone in the house and armed with a copy of *Windows Media Player* (it will choreograph itself to music) and the rather unusual RTS *Darwinia*, I had a taste of why amBX might yet be a

great idea. While it's true that any on-screen action will always eclipse the efforts of lights and fans, it is capable of adding a missing dimension to slower-paced, atmospheric titles – think the likes of *Fahrenheit*, *BioShock* or *Silent Hill* – that you'd probably play in a dark room anyway.





# LACHESIS

PRICE £45 MANUFACTURER Razer WEBSITE [powerdrive-computers.com](http://powerdrive-computers.com)

**I** CONFESS THAT my view of the Lachesis was tainted long ago by a forum conversation I'd had with someone who'd bought one.

Given that I'm a big fan of Razer's DeathAdder (issue 179, 89%) for its supreme comfort and effortless accuracy, I was shocked to hear that Razer's new 4,000dpi laser rodent was well-specified but "uncomfortable".

And so it proves. With a humped rear, narrow waist and broad shoulders, it's smooth and accurate but reminiscent of a Gaultier perfume bottle – not ideal for pro mousing. You do get switchable resolutions and no cursor leap when you lift off your mat to recentre, and it does feature onboard RAM for profiles, allowing you to plug in to other PCs and recall personalised button settings, but the older DeathAdder is simply more comfortable.

Of course, comfort is a personal thing and you may like it. Just try before you buy.



**PCZONE**  
**78**

# NX8800GT 512MB

PRICE £169  
MANUFACTURER MSI  
WEBSITE [msicomputer.co.uk](http://msicomputer.co.uk)

**M** ANY OF YOU will know the 8800GT as the card which offers GTX-rivalling performance for mainstream money.

What you might not realise is that the Radeon HD 3870 matches it in most areas, and that its cheaper 256MB version is barely able to keep pace at higher detail levels. If you've dashed out and bought one in the sales, you might want to swap it for the 512MB model tested here.

Benchmarks show that this GT has the measure of the high-end old guard, but what the numbers don't reveal is how much easier it is to live with – thanks to a single slot design, being slimmer than the rival Radeon, being whisper quiet, and you won't need more than a 400W power supply unit. This card really does make the GTS model redundant.



**PCZONE**  
**89**

The one thing to consider is that the ATI card is cheaper, more plentiful, and just as quick.

# MUSICPAL

PRICE £80 MANUFACTURER Freecom WEBSITE [www.freecom.com](http://www.freecom.com)

**D** ESPITE LOOKING LIKE it fell through a wormhole to the '80s, the MusicPal does all it claims to and is easier to use than any rival. It's just far too expensive.

This gadget is basically an alarm clock that uses a wireless (or wired) connection to play internet radio. It's suited to bedside cabinets and isn't meant to replace your PC or stereo – the 3W mono speaker puts paid to that, though there are stereo RCA and headphone outputs.

Rotate the right dial to highlight options and click to select them. Hop into settings, provide your wifi password, and that's it.

There are plenty of stations to cater for every taste.

You can even stream your own MP3s and WAVs from your desktop with the help of *Media Player 11*. In fact, MusicPal's one problem is that it's about £35 dearer than it should be.



**PCZONE**  
**75**

# RX3870 512MB OC EDITION

PRICE £156 MANUFACTURER MSI  
WEBSITE [msicomputer.co.uk](http://msicomputer.co.uk)

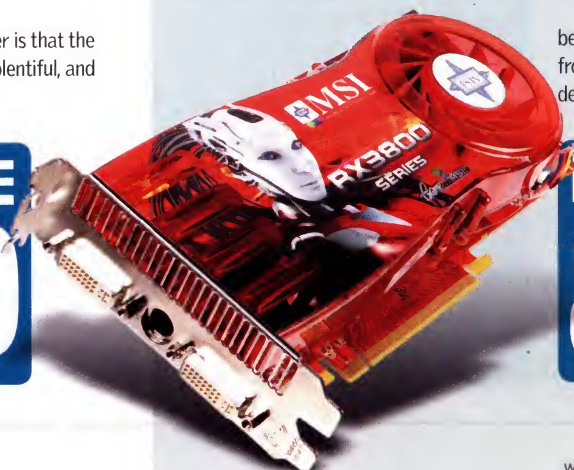
**W** HILE THE 8800 GT continues to grab headlines, the HD 3870 you see here offers the same levels of performance for £10 less.

Yes, it's a two-slot design requiring a 450W supply, and it is slightly noisier, but there's no noticeable whirr at the desktop. The sense of value you get from saving £10

off the price and gaining an HDMI makes up for any intrusion anyway.

Away from benchmarks, it's impossible to make out any difference between the HD 3870 and 8800 GT, so don't go reading much into any slight disparity in scores. They basically give your games the same amount of grunt.

That said the OC Edition has already been tickled, so if you want to get more from your PC, the 8800 GT's reference design will give you the room you need.



**PCZONE**  
**89**



## HOW TO...

## ACCESS YOUR PC WHILE OUT

## Need:

Need: Windows PC, VNC (or VNC-derived product)

## Time:

30 minutes

## Difficulty level:



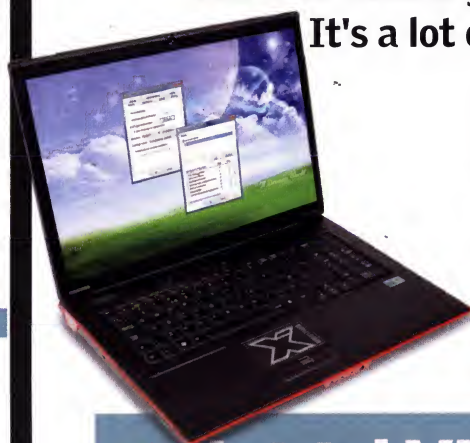
Phil Wand

Deep Blue

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

Jamie Sefton



Want to access your desktop while you're out of the house? It's a lot easier than you think. *Phil Wand* explains all

**E**VER MISSED YOUR computer? These days, the amount of time we spend hooked up to our PCs means it's very easy to suffer withdrawal symptoms when we're away from them. Has that *BitTorrent* download finished? Did I leave my email program open? Did that Lithuanian girl MSN me again?

Visiting your machine while you're sat at another is much easier than most people think. To get things rolling, open your browser, visit [realvnc.com](http://realvnc.com) and download *VNC Personal Edition*. This program gives you secure access to your PC from anywhere on the internet, though you do need to remember that, at the end of its 30-day trial period, you'll need to cough up a small sum to buy a licence or uninstall and downgrade to the *Free Edition*.

## REMEMBER:

The thing stopping crooks accessing your PC and rummaging through all your data is that they don't know the password. So if you use shitty passwords like 'arsenal' or 'qwerty', stop. Use a random series of letters, numbers and punctuation.



A **remote user** is someone who's outside your network, typically you round a mate's house or on holiday.

A **local user** is someone who's actually sat in the chair at the desk in front of the monitor, such as a burglar.

**DynDNS** sounds more complicated than it is. A domain name system, or **DNS**, converts human readable names, such as [pczone.co.uk](http://pczone.co.uk), into that forgettable sequence of numbers known as an **IP address**.

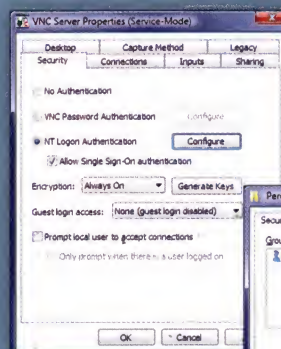
By creating an account at **DynDNS**, you are simply creating a new human-readable host name that points to your home gateway.

An **IP address** is the unique number that identifies a website or device attached to the internet. They come in two forms: **fixed** and **dynamic**.

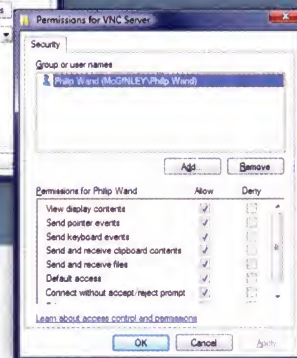
A **fixed IP address** doesn't change. While **dynamic IP addresses** do – normally bring assigned from a pool of addresses.

## 01 Initial VNC configuration

When running VNC's setup program, it's pretty safe to breeze through each wizard page hammering the Next button like the seasoned pro you think you are, only do make sure you choose 'Full Installation' at the appropriate juncture else you'll only have half what you need. On the Security tab, select 'NT Logon Authentication' and click the 'Configure' button – you should see that any user in your computer's Administrator's group are allowed in remotely. If you want to restrict access, remove that entry, click the 'Add' button and create your own permissions. Make sure 'Encryption' is set to 'Always On', and that guest login is disabled. Now select the Connections tab.



Using your PC when you're not there is easy.

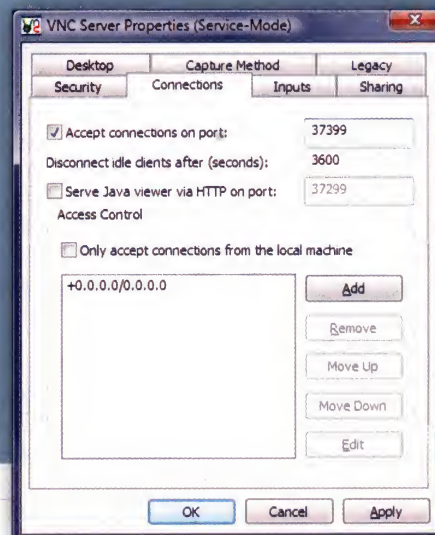


## 02 Restricting access further

The Connections tab determines how and where VNC listens for incoming data. By default it accepts remote users on port 5900, so to throw off casual hackers that's the first thing we should change. My advice would be to pick a random number somewhere between 30,000 and 60,000, and enter it into the box on the top right. While you can choose lower down, you're more likely to bump into other applications and multiplayer games if you do so.

For now, disable the Java viewer and select the Desktop tab, where you should make sure that you uncheck wallpaper, background patterns and interface effects options (note that this won't affect the appearance of your local session).

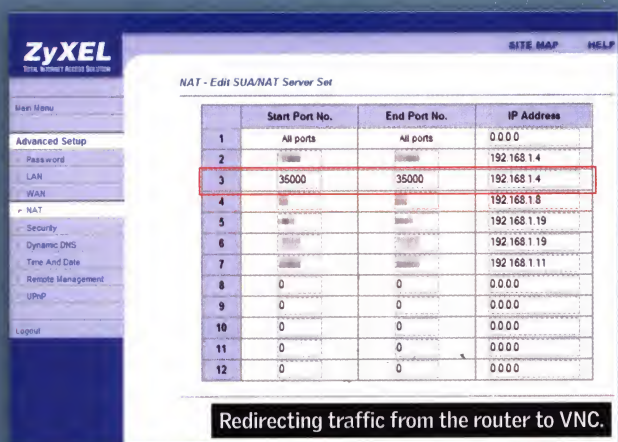
Change settings so they aren't left at default.





## 03 Updating your router and firewall

Once you've finished in the configuration program, you need to visit your router's configuration page and update network settings to reflect any changes. Any incoming connection on the port you defined in the previous step needs to be directed to the machine running VNC, so you need to open your router's 'Port Forwarding' page (sometimes called 'Gaming' or 'NAT') and enter the port number and then the IP address of the machine in question. You will also need to add this port to any firewall on the router and to the Windows firewall, if needed.



Redirecting traffic from the router to VNC.

## 04 Make sure the whole thing works

You must always test VNC before you leave the house, because if you've cocked up the configuration somewhere there's no way of resolving the issue without going back indoors again.

The easiest – but least known – way of doing this is by using a utility on the RealVNC website called *nettest*. Point your browser at the following URL, replacing the value on the end with the port you defined earlier:

[www.realvnc.com/cgi-bin/nettest.cgi?port=XXXXX](http://www.realvnc.com/cgi-bin/nettest.cgi?port=XXXXX)

If you've set things up properly, you should see a message that says, "Found a VNC Enterprise Edition or Personal Edition server." If this message doesn't appear, recheck your settings and try again.



My desktop, as seen from the bottom of my garden

## QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

**Q** I thought XP and Vista could do this anyway?

**A** They can, using Remote Desktop. But Remote

Desktop needs arcane command line switches to allow you to see what's actually on the screen back home, and registry hacks to change the port. You also can't copy files whereas with VNC you can.

**Q** What's to stop hackers finding the VNC port once I've changed it?

**A** Nothing, which is why you need a proper password. Changing the port deters idle mischief-makers.

**Q** Can I restrict access to certain IP addresses?

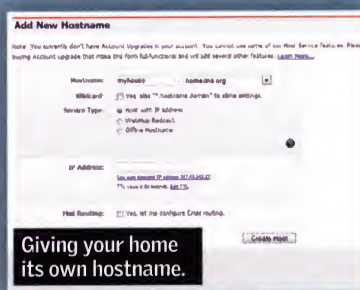
**A** You can configure IP-based access on the Connections tab. If you do this, you won't be able to hook up with your PC unless you're at one of the listed addresses.

**Q** Is it OK to use VNC's free version?

**A** It's not advisable to use VNC Free Edition over the internet. But it comes in handy if you want to access your PC from a laptop in bed.

## 05 Where's my house?

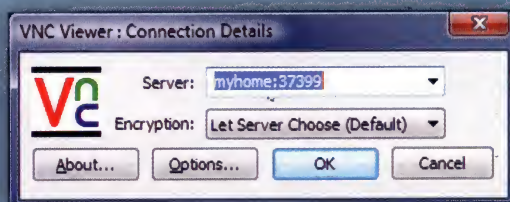
If your broadband package gives you a fixed IP address, you use that to identify your PC. But if you have a dynamic IP, you need help from a company such as DynDNS. Browse to [www.dyndns.com/services/dns/dyndns](http://www.dyndns.com/services/dns/dyndns) and click the 'Get Started' button to create a name for your internet connection. Now download the *DynDNS Windows Update* client ([www.dyndns.com/support/clients](http://www.dyndns.com/support/clients)). This ensures that when your IP address changes, the new name you created will point to your PC.



Giving your home its own hostname.

## 06 Connecting

Install VNC Viewer to the remote PC. Start it and type the hostname or the static IP address of the home PC, a colon and the port you chose (eg myhome:37399). Click 'OK' to connect. If the PC is locked, and you need to press Ctrl+Alt+Del, send this combo by clicking VNC Viewer's system menu in the top-right corner.



It's freewheeling from here.

## BUT WANDY, DONKEYTURBOVNC2 > VNC

As with anything computer-related VNC comes in many different styles and flavours, each one accompanied by a band of zealots who would have you believe that your choice was the wrong one. Just ignore them. The bottom line for remote desktop software is, go with the one you like using. I like VNC for the fact it replicates what's actually on the screen. I like the fact that by paying for the product, you get dedicated support from the people who wrote it. If you're swayed by any of the alternatives, the rules remain the same – install, configure, test, and then make secure!





# DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



## Problems?

We've all got them, you know... Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite green-flavoured Pringles? Been playing WOW so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at [wandy@dearwandy.com](mailto:wandy@dearwandy.com), including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

## DATE HATE

**Q** Is there any way of getting the date to appear alongside the time in my Windows Vista system tray? I can hover over the time to get what I want, but that's really not the immediate solution I'm after. It seems like such an obvious omission and what's annoying me most is that I'm sure I remember having it displayed on XP.

James Churchill

**A** To get the date to show in your tray area, right-click on the taskbar, make sure it's not set to Lock, then simply grab the top edge and resize it so it's at twice the usual height. The moment there's room, the day, date and time appear.

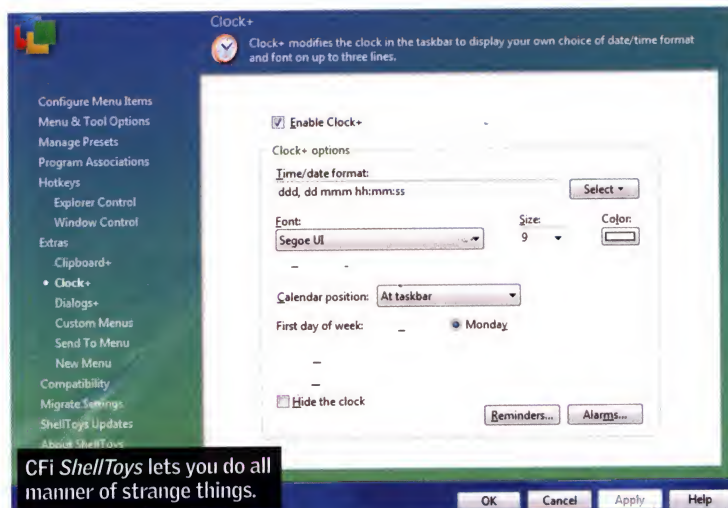
The problem here is of course that, with the taskbar being made pretty much redundant by Vista, having to lose desktop area just so you can see the date makes no sense at all.

Luckily there are other routes available. You can download a third party tool called ShowTime from [12ghosts.com](http://12ghosts.com), though as with many such utilities the number of useful features outnumber pointless ones by a factor of five. There's a simpler answer from [crispybytes.com](http://crispybytes.com), whose free DateInTray tool is a tray application that displays a number rather than an icon, and a slick and comprehensive suite ShellToys from [shelltoysxp.com](http://shelltoysxp.com), which despite the website name is Vista compatible.

## CONTROL FREAK

**Q** I've been running Vista Home Premium for almost a year now and I have a problem that crops up every few months: the control panels hide from me.

If I click the Start button and click Control Panel, a window appears briefly and then closes. If I



CFI ShellToys lets you do all manner of strange things.

change the Start Menu's behaviour to show the panels in a cascading menu, the menu shows up empty.

I've seen other people complain about this problem on forums but nobody seems to have a proper permanent fix. Can you please help?

Ben Angell

**A** The simplest fix for this common – and debilitating – Vista issue is to restart the Software Licensing and Software Licensing Notification services.

To do this, click Start, type `services.msc` and press Enter to load the Services management console. Stop both the SL UI Notification and Software Licensing services by highlighting their entries and clicking Stop on the control toolbar. Now press Start. That's the instant workaround.

You'll be glad to hear that Microsoft have a proper fix. Google for KB 936686, and follow the link through to KB 929637. From here you'll need to contact Microsoft Online Customer Services by following the link halfway down the page in the Resolution section, and you'll receive the file in two to three working days. But if you get nowhere, ask me to email it to you – it's something that's affected me.

## THE WAITING GAME

**Q** Being a student I've limited myself to a budget of £750 for a new desktop and monitor. After much searching, I found the best system fitting these requirements was the Chillblast Fusion Trojan. First, I was wondering if this is a decent machine capable of running newer games on reasonable settings. I was also wondering whether I should wait for the uprated 8800 GTS or save myself £20 and opt for the current 320MB.

Another option I have is to build my own PC, but I don't have much experience in this area and after looking at prices of the components, plus the cost of a screen and Vista, I'm not sure it would work out much cheaper than the Chillblast.

Nick Sheppard

**A** I said just last issue that the difference in cost between a properly designed, professionally built, soak-tested, warranty covered rig you can buy from a systems builder such as Chillblast is less expensive in

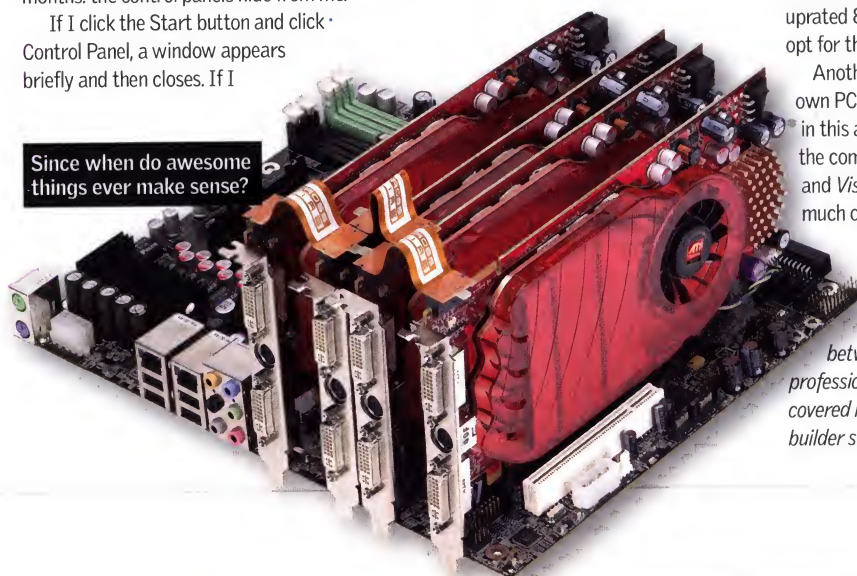
### DRIVER WATCH

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 7.1	21 NOV 07
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 16375	6 NOV 07

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 2.090007	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA	30 MAY 07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 2.15.000	9 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 4.2.090016	16 MAR 07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY FOR VISTA	2.12.00102

Since when do awesome things ever make sense?





## "A properly designed, professionally built, soak-tested, warranty covered rig you can buy from a systems builder is less expensive than doing it yourself"

Wandy's view is that self-building a PC is no longer always economical...

real terms than doing it yourself. My advice is to buy a ready built system, and once you're comfortable with (frustrated by) its performance, use that as a base for DIY experimentation.

Regarding the Fusion Trojan, the 8800 GTS 512MB – which should have replaced the GTS 640MB by now – is the card to wait for. Though in honesty I'd be inclined to forget the GTS line altogether and replace it with an 8800 GT.

While all the products I've mentioned will run Crysis at a level of detail that's more than acceptable, the mainstream GT is a single slot design with a seriously competitive price tag. You'll also not be wasting money on a high-end 8-series card when the 9-series is due in March.

Look out for a review of these NVIDIA cards versus their competitors elsewhere this issue.

### SLI... WHY?

**Q** Having read issue 188 where you reviewed an SLI motherboard and the improved power as a result of two GPUs, I hoped you might be able to educate me.

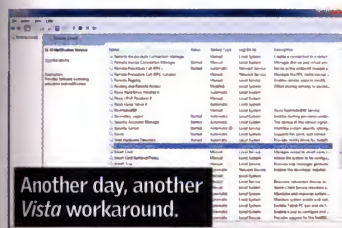
When I last upgraded, I was advised to go the path of the SLI because of the superior power it offered. But what does superior power actually mean?

Do two 6-series cards equate to one 7-series?

If so, how do I tell if a game is suitable for my system when reviews rarely cover SLI performance?

With so many great games reviewed over the last three months I would like to know if my system can cut it.

Stephen Evans



Another day, another Vista workaround.

**A** I'm not a fan of SLI or CrossFire. Not only do you have double up on what for most people is their biggest outlay anyway, but the potency of the arrangement only becomes obvious if you run everything in stupid-high resolution with stupid-high levels of detail and have a flagship processor to back it all up.

There's also the fact that each time NVIDIA and AMD introduce a new GPU line, it's always faster than any SLI predecessor. The 6800 Ultra SLI was beaten by one 7900 GTX, the 7900 GTX SLI was beaten by one 8800 GTS, and so on.

The bottom line is, unless you're made of money and/or are prepared to wait for triple and quadruple card benchmarks next year, forget about filling all the slots on your board. Save up for a nice sofa instead.

### DRIVER YOU MAD

**Q** I just spotted the 'Cheese and Chalk' letter from Rob Walter in issue 188 about installing XP on a Vista machine, and felt I should share my experience of exactly this problem (ie the weird graphical effects after installing XP).

Surprisingly, this is not down to faulty hardware, but to a storage controller driver.

I first saw it when trying to put XP on a new Dell workstation: I hadn't installed the storage drivers properly and had exactly this issue.

It would probably be solved by supplying updated storage drivers during XP setup (by pressing F6) and having one of those archaic floppy things), or disabling AHCI in the BIOS if possible.

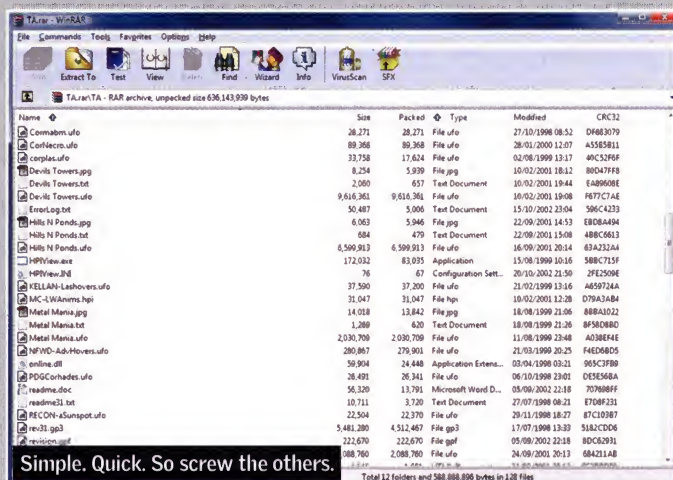
The issue does not occur in Vista as it already has drivers for most SATA storage controllers.

Chris Stos-Gale

**A** Something for Rob Walter to try, assuming he's not torn out all his hair and bought an Xbox.

For my full How To... guide on installing Windows XP on a Vista PC, check out PC ZONE 190. **PCZ**

## 50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



## 33 WINRAR

COSTS Free (demo) FROM rarlab.com

Back when Windows was a technology clown car, WinZip was the reason I stuck with Apple Macs. And while Windows 95 made things less comical, it was still dreadful – particularly as you had to buy bolt-on extras to raise the experience past 'dreadful' to 'about bearable'. You had to have a memory manager like Quarterdeck's QEMM, for a period the best-selling software program in the world, and then there were nasty little tools like WinZip.

WinZip was a graphical front-end to Phil Katz's DOS-based compression tool. At any other time, such an ergonomic nightmare would have disappeared without trace, but because Windows was allowing thickos to use computers for the first time, and because everyone had 52KB modems and 100MB hard drives, compression utilities were obligatory. Sadly, nobody bothered with

a dedicated front end for Haruyasu Yoshizaki's superior LHaarc (probably because 'zip' was the more marketable term), and so everyone ended up with bloody WinZip. It's still used even today, despite Microsoft supporting the format natively in XP and Vista. If you've ever downloaded an installer only to be asked to type by hand the path where you want your files decompressed (no good looking for the 'browse' button, as there isn't one – that's the magic of WinZip).

Which brings me on to WinRAR, a competitor product that not only handles Zip files with aplomb but also gives you the ability to read and create superior RAR files, which are often smaller, include special features such as data recovery and encryption, can be split into multiple files. All of which explains why this is the favoured compression format of P2P filesharers.

**FORUMS:**  
DIRECT FROM  
DEARWANDY.COM

(spoon13) I have 'Show hidden files and folders' set in my folder options but I can't see them. When I change the setting to 'Do not show hidden files and folders', I still can't see them, but when I return to the options dialog it's changed back to 'Show hidden files and folders'. And I still can't see them. (Wandy) Obvious question: Do you have any anti-virus software on your machine? (spoon13) AVG Free Edition (Simon) There's a few things to try at [snipurl.com/hiddenfiles](http://snipurl.com/hiddenfiles) involving the registry. (spoon13) Thanks Simon! I can at least view the files now. (Wandy) Is anyone not the least bit worried that AVG hadn't batted an eyelid?





## Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Richard at [watchdog@pczone.co.uk](mailto:watchdog@pczone.co.uk) with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to him at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

## Moral of the story: if you suspect your PC has a fault, report it immediately



Saintly ISP Zen helps out WOW players.

# WATCHDOG



Richard Cosgrove fights the good fight. And wins! Usually...



### THE ACCUSED: BT THE PROBLEM: Delayed broadband

Prior to last Christmas (we don't half work ahead on this magazine), reader Jake Kidde-Hansen contacted Watchdog with a problem he faced with BT.

Jake told us that he contacted BT Homemover's service on 6 November as he was moving home. As he was also subscribed to BT's broadband service, he asked for his phone line and broadband connection to be transferred to his new home – one mile away.

BT informed him that it would take five working days. A month later, he was still waiting and contacted Watchdog.

As a website designer who worked from home, Jake couldn't afford a break in his internet service.

**PC ZONE INVESTIGATION:** While BT make moving home simple – they provide a free phone number to call, to arrange everything – shifting a broadband connection can be problematic. Whenever an internet service provider sets up a broadband connection on a BT landline, they place a 'marker' on the line, identifying it as in use by that company. When a broadband provider is changed, this marker has to be removed before the new connection is started. But this should take 10 working days, at most. Unfortunately, for technical and engineering reasons, BT is unable to remove a broadband marker in a shorter time. So when you move home and BT ask you to wait a fortnight, you have to be patient.

The delay in getting Jake online was caused by a marker on Jake's new line having to be removed. But BT lost an email regarding Jake's transfer, causing another delay of 10 working days, while BT started the marker removal process again.

An added complication was that Jake had a domestic broadband package from BT. This meant that he was unable to apply for compensation for loss of business and additional expenses while his connection was down. If you want to use broadband for working at home, make sure you get a package designed for that use.

**FINAL VERDICT:** Six weeks after telling BT he was moving home, Jake was back online. He received an apology from BT and the offer of three month's free line rental and broadband – worth £90.

Sometimes you have no choice but to wait. Log in Sign up BT

View search tips

At home

Overview Products & services Your account Support & advice What's new

Accounts Your profile Address book Faults Moving home Order tracking

You are here: Your account > Moving home > Move with less stress

Moving home: Move with less stress

Move with less stress

Organise your move

Move your broadband

Useful contacts

Moving your BT services is quick and easy. Find out how to move with less stress.

**Move all your BT services**

We can arrange the transfer of your BT Broadband and BT phone line with one simple call. We'll also transfer your BT Together Option and any BT Calling Features to your new address automatically, so you won't miss out on any services. Please call us on 0800 800 150 giving at least five full working days.

Call 0800 800 150 to get moving Mon-Sat, 8am-8pm

## ALIENWARE

### THE ACCUSED: Alienware THE PROBLEM: Melting laptop

Randolph Payne bought an Alienware M7700 laptop in October 2005. Over time the laptop developed some problems due to its heat output: "The grey casing slowly darkened around the exhaust near the left-hand side of the keyboard... At times I couldn't even rest my hand on it as it was so hot. I thought it was just the fact it was a gaming laptop and probably normal."

In July 2006 when the laptop started shutting down and refusing to power up, Payne sent it to be repaired. Payne says the problems continued and instead of getting the M7700 repaired again, he bought a new laptop, but kept the Alienware PC.

Last October he contacted Alienware, requesting that they replace the laptop's graphics card, so he could use it with modern games. He was told the PC was out of warranty, but another company could replace the graphics card for £500.

Frustrated with Alienware, Payne contacted Watchdog.

**PC ZONE INVESTIGATION:** We discovered that the M7700 had a reputation for overheating, in the same spot the Payne described. According to reports from users the M7700's powerful graphics card would overheat, damaging the case and internal workings. We checked with Alienware about the laptop, and it's no longer in production and they're all out of warranty. This means that Alienware are under no obligation to fix any faults with it.

On top of this, under UK consumer law if a user reports a fault to a manufacturer within six months of purchase, the manufacturer has to prove the fault was not present when the item was sold. After six months it is down to the user to prove the fault was present.

**FINAL VERDICT:** The M7700 is out of warranty, and Alienware don't have to do anything to fix it. Moral of the story: if you suspect your PC has a fault, report it immediately. **PCZ**



## SAINTS NOT SINNERS



World of Warcraft subscriber Carl Ritchie told Watchdog with a complaint about WOW and Zen, his ISP. According to Ritchie, during November WOW subscribers using Zen's service had their datarates cut and latencies increased. The players complained to Blizzard, who placed the blame on TeliaSonera – a

European ISP. It turns out that UK WOW subscribers who used Zen's service, were being routed through TeliaSonera's French servers, causing the delays. But within a fortnight TeliaSonera and Zen fixed the problem, and WOW ran at full speed. A great example of proper pan-European customer service.



**REMEMBER:****SAVE MONEY  
AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT**

Turn off your heating and open up your PC's case. And bask in the warmth from your PC when you play *Crysis*. (PC ZONE isn't liable for any damage to yourself or your PC caused by following daft advice.)

# HARDWARE DIVIDE

We see plenty of new gear at *PC ZONE*, but these are the bits we just adore

## LOADED?

### GRAPHICS

#### 8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £370

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE [xfxforce.co.uk](http://xfxforce.co.uk)

AMD have arrived! And the Radeon they brought along is nice enough, but it's neither faster or slower than the 8800 GTS, so our favourite GTX keeps hogging the top spot. Yes, we could have put the Ultra here, but it's over £500 and not much faster. Even we're not that stupid.



### PROCESSOR



#### CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

EXPECT TO PAY £630

MAN Intel

WEB [intel.co.uk](http://intel.co.uk)

Faster than its predecessor and any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme CPU has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache, and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, it has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

### MOTHERBOARD



#### D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY £155

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEB [intel.co.uk](http://intel.co.uk)

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XB, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

### HDD



#### WD7500 AAKS

EXPECT TO PAY £109

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEB [wdc.com](http://wdc.com)

Almost as fast as the outgoing 150GB Raptor but with five times the capacity and half the noise. Products like the WD7500AAKS and Hitachi's (noisy and pricey) Deskstar 7K1000 are now so quick that you don't need to be spend extra on 10,000rpm drives. So don't.

### SCREEN



#### SM226BW

EXPECT TO PAY £219

MANUFACTURER Samsung

WEBSITE [samsung.com/uk](http://samsung.com/uk)

The Samsung SM226BW is handsome and fast – just 2ms grey to grey – and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks, making it ideal for any kind of game.

### SOUNDCARD



#### SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

### SPEAKERS



#### Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £195

MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE [www.logitech.co.uk](http://www.logitech.co.uk)

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

## SKINT?

### GRAPHICS

#### GeForce 8800GT

EXPECT TO PAY £142

MANUFACTURER XFX

WEBSITE [XGXforce.com](http://XGXforce.com)

Ladies and gentlemen, the card of the moment. While we've yet to put a retail GeForce 8800 GT against its Radeon opponents, reference benchmarks have shown that the NVIDIA box is the one to buy. Just avoid those fussier model variants that sail close to £200.



### PROCESSOR



#### CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY £105

MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE [intel.co.uk](http://intel.co.uk)

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing speed for the money. A great entry-level buy.

### MOTHERBOARD



#### CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £60

MANUFACTURER ASRock

WEB [asrock.com](http://asrock.com)

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support.

### HDD



#### CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE [www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)

It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

### SCREEN



#### VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY £118

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE [www.viewsonic.co.uk](http://www.viewsonic.co.uk)

The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19in screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the 1440 x 900 panel of its VA1912w sibling.

### SOUNDCARD



#### SOUND BLASTER X-FI AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £20

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

### SPEAKERS



#### X-530

EXPECT TO PAY £45

MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE [logitech.co.uk](http://logitech.co.uk)

Say goodbye to Creative's P5800s, longest serving denizens of the Buyer's Guide, and guten tag to Logitech's swisher looking X-530s. With the edge on quality and available everywhere, the Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music.



# Nintendo®

## THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

### The Force Is Strong!

Unleash the Force through  
your **Wii Remote**.



## On Sale Now!





**PCZONE**

# FREEPLAY



Born free, as free as the wind blows

**FREE GAMES!**

## WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

### Tiger eBay

**I**N MY SHORT time "having a column" it's become something of a theme to celebrate something that I have managed to get for free, whether it's free granola from room service, or something I accidentally stole from Superdrug.

Recently, however, I was given an in-game gift for *WOW* – a Spectral Tiger. I dusted off my long-neglected priest, ran to Booty Bay, and cashed in my code. At no stage did I question myself, and for some minutes, I was genuinely excited. Wait until I take screenshots of this!

I quickly learned to hate riding Barry. The second I mounted, a crowd of slack-jawed ineloquents made me pose for photographs, and demanded I tell them how to get one. I admit, I was just standing in populated areas waiting for this very thing to happen, but still – never a please, never a thank you, just an under-spelled command to sit there while they got their mate to diagnose my mount.

I went back to using my basic Skeletal Horse, who didn't seem to mind my infidelity, even after six months of me not bothering to log in, and my free gift now sits unused in the bank. I don't want to use it, and I can't even give it away – the item is bound to the character who picks it up.

Here's the kick in the coccyx: the codes for these mounts are selling on eBay for £350. I don't know who to be more mad at – the idiots who'll pay hundreds of pounds for a see-through tiger, or myself for deciding I wanted to ride a translucent fucking tiger around an imaginary world populated, it seems, by rude and illiterate cretins.

*Jon Blyth*

Jon Blyth, staff writer



Line up.

### 108 Demo pages

Demos: those little slices of death. How I loathe them. No, that's sleep.



Racing line.

### 110 News

Only two pages of last month was worth writing about.



Line art.

### 112 Freeware

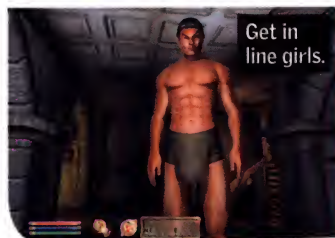
Full free games from developers who're just in it for the chicks.



Line dancing.

### 114 Play!

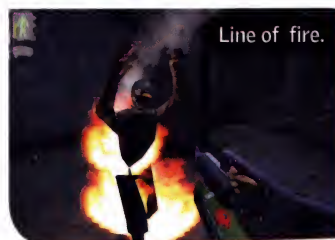
A wheelbarrow full of mods for your installation pleasure.



Get in line girls.

### 116 Jackass

Back to *Oblivion* for a masterclass in bullying.



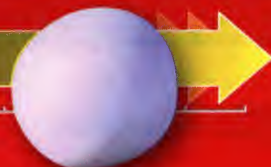
Line of fire.

### 118 Online Zone

The internet comes, to let you chat and fight with we Zoners.

**PCZONE  
FREE-O-METER****0**  
HOURS

\*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

**124**  
HOURS\*



# Demos

Ed Zitron gives another desolate insight into his early life



## UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT

We never saw it coming... [www.sega.com/gamesite/universeatwar](http://www.sega.com/gamesite/universeatwar)

PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover disc support. Or email [support@futurenet.co.uk](mailto:support@futurenet.co.uk), including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

SEGA'S *UNIVERSE AT War* is one of those RTS things that lets you take out that god complex of yours by controlling hundreds of robo-alien and imagining every enemy to be a bully from your troubled past, his lamentations being the veritable payback for every penny of yours he stole.

The demo gives you a great perspective on the destructive power of the Hierarchy's walkers, their large protruding legs crushing the ground around them, their lasers melting the opposition. It's a strange RTS in that it's not about World War II, and it's remarkably light-hearted for a game about humanity getting squished. The hilariously generic cast of 'snobbish, power-hungry alien', 'war-faring but questioning alien', and 'herdy information-giving alien', are clichéd, but immense fun.

You're able to play the tutorial, as well as a few missions from the main game's campaign, and it's a hoot and a holler to say the least.



### PYRAMID SCHEME

Unlike an ill-fated trip to Egypt, when the Hierarchy decide to shoot at the Great Pyramid, they don't get deported. Instead, they all retreat for reasons unknown, perhaps proving that all aliens are cowards.



### ORLOK THE ORTHOPEDIC

"I'm Orlok the Eternal. A hero unit. Between leading missions of destruction I like a good book and a foot rub, but until then the decimation of the human race will have to do."



## UNIVERSE AT PHWOAR Anatomy of an alien invasion.

### PRIMITIVES

If they weren't under siege by an all-powerful alien hive mind, humanity would be taking the Hierarchy to court over them calling us all "primitives". This is not fair and very offensive and we all take umbrage at it.



### DEATH BY SNU-SNU

Or by mobile death-platform, as *Universe at War* prefers. You're able to build these gigantic habitat robots that crush, kill and destroy. Plus, build units with it that crush, kill and destroy even more.





## MAPLE STORY

Put on your fedoras and forget to wash

[www.maplestory.com](http://www.maplestory.com)

UNLIKE *UROTSUKIDOJI*, *MAPLE Story* thankfully doesn't have anything to do with tentacle sex. In fact, other than being anime related, they suffer few similarities, which is great, because the aforementioned film is rather disturbing.

*Maple Story* on the other hand is a joyous, free-to-play MMO romp, like *Streets of Rage* mixed with of cutesy-wootsy anime characters, bishing and bashing their way through reams of monsters to get experience like feverish addicts. Just take care that *Maple Story's* sugary goodness doesn't rot your teeth.



### Cuddly warfare: the truth

This is a game that goes far beyond snail death



#### MAPLE MARRIAGE

This is one of the few MMOs to actually have in-game marriage built-in, with bride and groom expected to perform a certain quest path before the service.



#### FOR THE COOL KIDS

So popular is the game in Japanese playgrounds that worried mothers level up their unpopular child's characters while he/she is at school. Fact.

## COH: OPPOSING FRONTS

You ain't no kind of Europe. You frontin'

[www.companyofheroesgame.com](http://www.companyofheroesgame.com)

MORE INTERESTING THAN *World War Hulk*, and far less destructive, *World War II* may have been the basis for at least 95 per cent of PC games ever released, to our count. *Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts* is the standalone continuation of *Company of Heroes*, continuing the story

of *World War II* and how it went down. Which is part of the problem – you know how it's going to end. The difference is here that this game is at the zenith of WWII RTS-itude. Relic have constructed an able, customisable engine, a slick UI, and a game that oozes heroism and peril.



1 In any tactical manoeuvre, it's best to make your planes attack your enemies rather than mercilessly bomb your own troops. US Air Force, take note.

2 The exception is the Arrow Assault of Basildon of 1942 (left), in which the Germans sent gigantic, fanged arrows to feast on the British public.

3 The arrows were fought off using a combination of mechanised public toilet notices and the sharp edges of One Way signs.

### Nazis: Eco-baddies

Comedy krauts love CO<sup>2</sup>



#### COMEDY NAZIS

The demo starts you with hastily constructed, wet-behind-the-ears German soldiers, who talk in hilariously bad German accents.



#### GREEN MACHINE

These tanks don't have hybrid engines. In fact they're more likely to dry-hump a heron than care about all the global warming they cause.

## THE BEST OF THE REST



### SAM & MAX: MAOI BETTER BLUES

Sam and Max have made an illustrious return to both gaming and our hearts, with a brand of sarcastic, off-the-wall humour that can only be replicated inside *PC ZONE* itself. This is not to suggest we're all funny in anything but a slapstick, sadistic fashion.

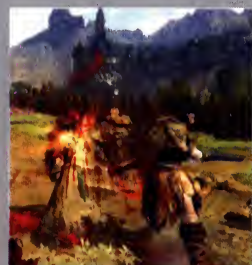
[www.telltalegames.com](http://www.telltalegames.com)



### RAIL SIMULATOR

It's a sad truth, but when we were young - we all desperately wanted to be train drivers. Or did we? A quick office survey suggests that most of us wanted to drive a van. Still, with this genuine simulator of what it's like to drive a train we can at least experience second best.

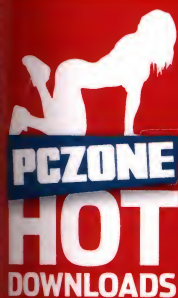
[www.railsimulator.com](http://www.railsimulator.com)



### AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

Conan is a game that has gone from having a whisper of excitement around it, all the way to arousing a fully fledged whimper. Join us, then, in our mounting excitement by watching a trailer that shows exactly what other MMOs have been missing. Namely, frequent and bloody decapitations and the odd woolly mammoth.

[www.ageofconan.com](http://www.ageofconan.com)



### DEMOCRACY 2

[snipurl.com/democ2](http://snipurl.com/democ2)



We have all wished to rule the country at some time in our pointless lives, but these urges can now be sated by *Democracy 2*. You can choose your political standpoint, change taxes, and even accept substantial donations and fail to report them.

### WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

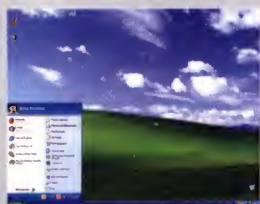
[snipurl.com/reckoning](http://snipurl.com/reckoning)



Nobody will ever admit that there are games that do MMO better than *WOW*, but we're starting a resistance. This trailer will be your primer – watch it, and then meet us under Tower Bridge in four weeks from this issue hitting the shelves.



## SNIPPETS



### CHEAP VISTA PLAN DEAD

Microsoft came up with a money saving idea recently. Instead of bricking up PCs that have *Windows Pirate Edition* installed, Gates' people decided to make the *Windows Genuine Advantage* utility nag people into buying *Vista* at a discount. The plan was 'go' until news hit the internet, and the folks at Redmond realised people might start using pirated versions of *Vista* just to get the discount.



### FREE IPODS BAFFLE HOMELESS CHILDREN

Over 100 children lost their homes in the Poway area of California in the recent wildfires. Quick to respond, a local councilwoman wrote to Apple, suggesting that a suitable replacement for their houses might be one of their new delightful iPods. Apple responded with a 100 free nanos, which the children can now cheerfully synchronise with the PCs that were destroyed in the fire.

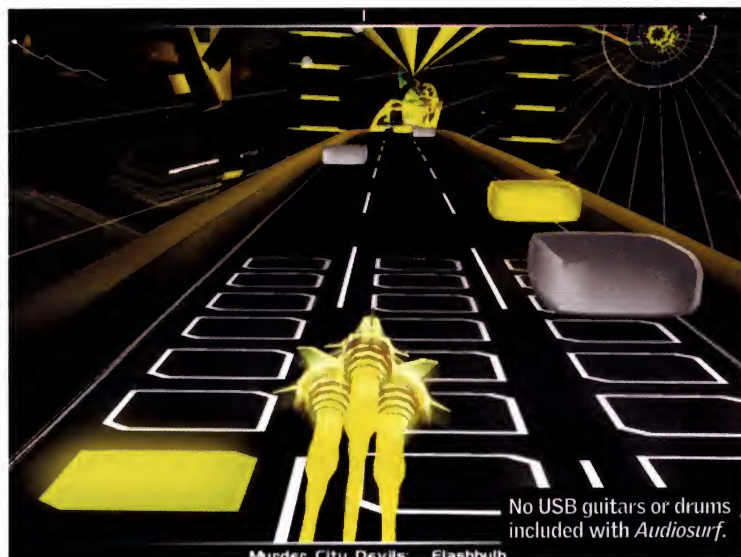
# AUDIOSURF'S UP FOR AWARDS

As accurate as it is immodest [www.bestgameever.com](http://www.bestgameever.com)

**ROCK BAND, GUITAR Hero**, and *SingStar*. All console classics, and all are a fine way to spend an evening. Except *SingStar*, which we're shit at. All of them, however, hamstringing you into playing a limited selection of songs. Even with the opportunity for downloadable content, you're still at the mercy of what's deemed appropriate.

Remember *Vib Ribbon*? This graphically minimal and underavailable PlayStation game did the rare thing of using the technology available to it, and allowed you to put your own CDs in. Sure, you wouldn't survive three seconds if you put your Fudge Tunnel disc in, but it was a huge novelty to play along to your own music.

*Audiosurf* is set to give a radical, and beautiful overhaul to that idea. And it's working well – even before its official release, beta testers were so impressed with the game (and the \$95 entry fee that you pay to be considered for inclusion) that it's the finalist in three categories in the 10th Annual Independent Games Festival.



The screenshot tells the story: you're a spaceship, travelling along a corridor of music-generated landscapes. Trying to describe the game trammels you into pretentious '90's music journalism; we're certain that nobody's used a phrase

like "flying alongside the caterpillar of euphony" since the review of Suede's debut single, but that's literally what you do in *Audiosurf*.

Expect more comment as the game due for release this very month.

## COME ON YOU WOLVES

*Wolfquest* released, elks harrassed

[www.wolfquest.org](http://www.wolfquest.org)

**LIKE MOST PEOPLE**, you probably spend hours hunched over a pouffe, telling your parents that you never asked to be born a stupid human being, and that the only thing you want for your birthday is to become a wolf.

*Wolfquest* is perhaps the most realistic wolf simulator since 1995's *Wolf*. The first chapter has you roaming Yellowstone Park's Amethyst mountain, allowing you to hunt a bunch of elk in the traditional way – chasing them until they get knackered. You can even find a mate using a sizey palette of howls. Other single-player distraction include the ability to scare coyotes and bears.



However, the best thing has to be the multiplayer, in which you can work as part of pack to slaughter an elk.

*Wolfquest* is killing and shagging presented as real educatainment, and it's a fantastic way to spend a Sunday afternoon.



Crash ships in BBO.



It's *Bounty Bay Online*. Not *King Kong*. Honest.

## FREE BAY

Visit *Bounty Bay* for nowt

**WITH PIRATES OF the Burning Sea** ([www.burningsea.com](http://www.burningsea.com)) due for review next issue, and Disney launching their free-to-play *Pirates of the Caribbean* MMO recently, it seemed like the right time for Frogster to make the client of their piratical MMO adventure free.

Suddenly, *Puzzle Pirates* ([www.puzzlepirates.com](http://www.puzzlepirates.com)) seem like the

distinguished grandfather of the MMO scene. In fact, if there were really this many pirates around back in day, there'd have been no merchants to steal from.

*Bounty Bay Online* ([bbo.yusho.de/en](http://bbo.yusho.de/en)) has both land and sea battles, and if you're minded to try one of the more complicated piratical games free for a month, then the link's above.



# FIRE CANNON, MISS PIRATES

Codemasters miss the criminal hardcore

www.theregister.co.uk/2007/12/06/codemasters\_file\_sharers

**PIRACY IS WRONG**, yes? It may take a special kind of human to get angry about it, but the one thing it isn't doing is rewarding developers for their continuing efforts. So Codemasters have every right to be angry: they're losing important pounds to those parasitical buggers.

So, they hired copyright specialist legal firm Davenport Lyons, who hired a Swiss tech firm, LOGISTEP (www.logistepag.com), who linked names and addresses of people in the UK to IP addresses being used by P2P software to distribute Codemasters' products. These people received letters demanding a confession, a payment of hundreds of pounds, and a promise to never do it again.

Only thing is, the Swiss are allegedly getting it wrong. A report from IT news site *The Registry* (www.theregister.co.uk) claimed one alleged file-sharer, accused of downloading *Colin McRae's DiRT* from five different IP addresses, has received five letters, each demanding a cash payment, a written confession, and a promise that he won't do it again.



Colin McRae's DiRT: popular with the Jolly Roger software crowd.

"They sent me five letters all about the same game but with different IP addresses and different times," the anonymous source told *The Registry*.

Other commentators on *The Registry* have accused LOGISTEP of flawed detective work, failing to get accurate times of when the downloading occurred,

and not taking ISPs using dynamic IP addresses (IDs that move between a pool of computers) into account.

Codemasters have a point – and a big one at that – but if these claims prove to be true, then they've found a brand new way of sucking up bad will through a pretty wide straw.

# VALVE STATS KEEP COMING

Information may not be power, but it's still interesting

steampowered.com/status/tf2/tf2\_stats.php

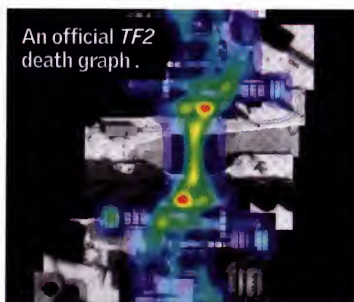
**IF THERE'S ANYTHING** more interesting than the number at the end of a review, then it's hundreds of numbers relating to our favourite games. Did you know that 25 per cent of players couldn't be arsed playing *Episode 2* for more than an hour?

*Team Fortress 2* stats came out in December, which gave everyone a chance to say "yeah, figures". Amongst the surprises is that Medic is less popular

than Pyro, although we'd have said they were both at the bottom. Having played on servers with way too many Spies, we're glad to see them checking in at third least popular.

Defying the law of averages even the symmetrical maps show a blue/red favouritism – and in the Dustbowl, it's most pronounced of all, with Red winning 70 per cent of the time.

Numbers are amazing.



An official TF2 death graph.

## SNIPPETS



### MONTY MOLE'S CHRISTMAS

snipurl.com/montymole  
Not only is this advertising a mag that isn't us, it's a magazine from a rival publishing company. However, Monty Mole's Christmas comeback is just so lovely that we've decided to give a link to the website that made and hosts it, without mentioning the name of the magazine. Because we're right bloody petulant.



### LUMINES

www.wildgames.com/games/lumines  
Little bit fed-up that the consoles got *Lumines*, and took it as yet another sign that PC gaming was dead and decided to get a Nintendo DS? Well, fear no more – *Lumines* is now available for download from Wild Games!

## Bug-Fix of the Month

**THIS MONTH**  
WORLD OF PADMAN V1.2 PATCH



"Nasty laughing when the Imp gets grabbed is now global, and there's now a wire in the lightbulb."

## Movie of the month

### AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

It's the MMO that came back from the naff. After postponing the release of their game in the wake of negative feedback, FunCom have gone and made it better. This video shows a great range of characters, action and general "hello". There's also a C64 *Barbarian*-style decapitation!



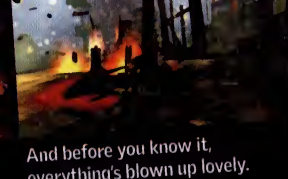
It starts off with a man in a pub. All good things start in a pub and someone with a pint.



Then it turns into *Rome: Total War* for a bit, which is another good game.



An ogre reminds us that this is fantasy; there's also a bunch of wizards.



And before you know it, everything's blown up lovely. Thanks, FunCom.





# Freeware



Steve Hogarty works hard for the money, so treat him right

This month, flap flap flap flap flap, run on a wall, shoot asteroids in an LSD-inspired shooter, play a game that isn't *Metroid*, collect stars without the help of an pasta-chugging plumber, spin a gnome right round baby right round, try to read Japanese, and do some physics.

## FLYWRENCH

Adjust flaps for fun Dev: Messhof | [www.messhof.com/games/flywrench.php](http://www.messhof.com/games/flywrench.php)

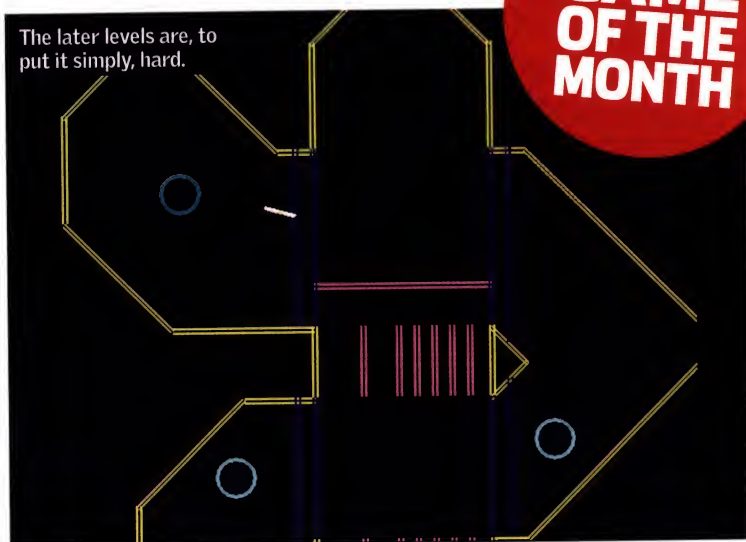
**THE LAST TIME** we encountered a Messhof game, we wished a plane would crash right into him, destroying him forever. That never happened, or if it did it only impacted marginally upon his ability to create games that infuriate and delight us in equal measures.

His previous title, *Punishment 2: The Punishing*, took the simple platforming mechanic of running and jumping, laid it against a brightly-coloured retro backdrop and then forced you to master every screen before allowing you to proceed. This sadism made us pleasingly frustrated and angry.

*Flywrench* is similarly deceptive. Using just the arrow keys, you control a simple, hinged ship. Press up to flap (during a flap you're red), press down to roll (during a roll you're green), and press left and right to move in those directions (at these times you're white). It's like *Lander*, but with a bit more fluttering.

The levels contain barriers of certain colours: red ones you can only pass through while 'flapped' (holding the up key keeps your 'wings' folded down), white ones you can only pass through while not flapping, and green ones that can only be passed through while rolling.

The later levels are, to put it simply, hard.



This means you've got to juggle manoeuvring your ship with your current state – stopping your flaps to pass through a white barrier means you'll drop towards the deadly floor, so it's crucial that you flap up some sideways momentum before you try.

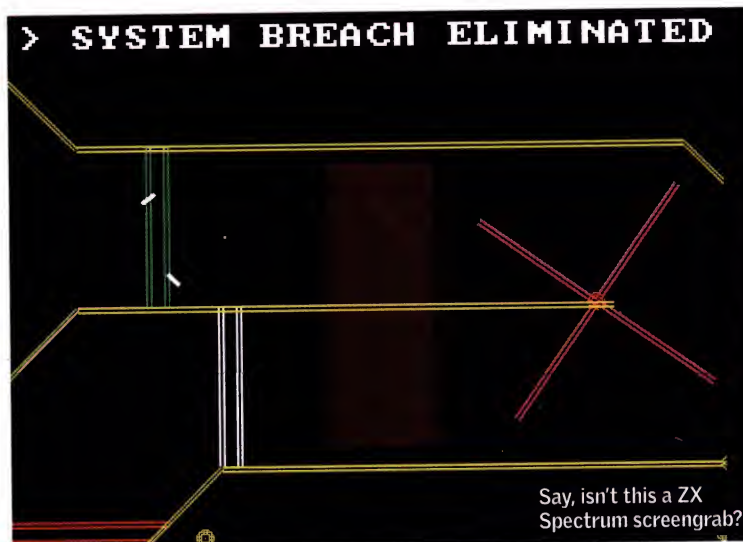
However, soon you'll be rolling through barriers, flapping into timed switches, folding your way through obstacles and

fluttering through narrow passages like a fully professional, and choreographed *Flywrench* pilot.

The simplicity of the controls means that death is always completely your fault, giving you an inescapable sense of self-loathing as you reach the final stages of the game – where a lovely credit sequence lives.

*Flywrench*'s glitchcore chip music might drive you insane, but if it doesn't everything else about the game will. But it drives you to the good kind of insane; the kind whereby the intensity of our hatred towards Messhof washes over us like a soothing, angry bath.

Overall, *Flywrench* is good retro gaming, that proves graphics don't make a good game, gameplay does.



Say, isn't this a ZX Spectrum screengrab?



Flap my friend, flap.

## ONCE IN SPACE

All over the place

Dev: Arvi Teikari | [koti.mbnet.fi/arvitei/ois/](http://koti.mbnet.fi/arvitei/ois/)

**THIS GAME'S AUTHOR** claims he was inspired by *Mario Galaxy*, in that you run about a floating platform collecting stars. You can stroll around the curved edges of the platform to effect a change in the game's gravitational status, snapping it at right angles to the platform and allowing yourself access to previously inaccessible areas. In other words, you can walk on the walls and the ceilings and that. The controls are fiddly, and the collision detection will often see you launching yourself into the endless abyss, but when it works it works extremely well. Stars can only be collected when gravity is pointing the right way, so the game is a disorientating puzzle, as well as an odd platformer. The scrawled visuals are pleasing, and slightly lazy.



## SPHERES OF CHAOS

### Balls of madness

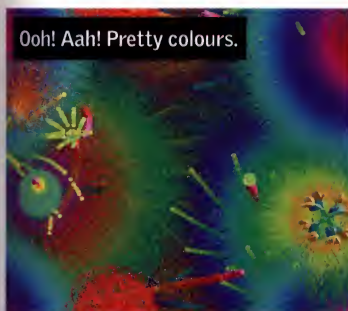
Dev: Iain McLeod | [www.spheresofchaos.com](http://www.spheresofchaos.com)

**THIS ASTEROIDS CLONE** used to be something you'd have to pay for. Hah! Can you imagine? The game's new status as a free being brings us one step closer to a futuristic, moneyless *Star Trek* economy.

*Spheres of Chaos* prides itself on emulating what being on drugs is actually like, by using a clever combination of bright, vivid colours, fractal patterning, and

a dizzying amount of motion blur – exactly what taking 'a cocaine trip' is like, according to official medical reports done up by government doctors.

Underneath this laughably untrue facsimile of a drug trip lives a fairly standard *Asteroids* clone though. While it wasn't worth paying for, we'll forgive it now it's free.



Ooh! Aah! Pretty colours.



More colours than a hippy's flares.

## ANOTHER BOUND

### Samus it ever was

Crystal Light Stage | [hp.vector.co.jp/authors/VA029904/anotherbound](http://hp.vector.co.jp/authors/VA029904/anotherbound)

**THIS IS LIKE** a bizarre lo-fi version of *Metroid Prime*. Your character struts about some sort of moon base (it's all in Japanese so I've used guesswork here), with a massive gun on their arm, firing plasma at floors, walls, ceilings, and enemies, in an attempt to rescue a man.

As always, the Japanese freeware scene terrifies us from behind its shield of a language barrier – is this legal? Who's playing this? Who made this? If only they would speak English.

*Another Bound* is a confusing jaunt, but an intriguingly well made one at that.



Was I meant to kill him? I dunno.

## GARDEN GNOME CARNAGE

Gnomes: now officially cool

Dev: Ultimortal | [www.yoyogames.com/games/show/18644](http://www.yoyogames.com/games/show/18644)

**NOW THIS IS** more like it, no guns and wizards here – just a festive action game in which you, a building, must swing a garden gnome, who is attached to your chimney by a rope, to kill swarms of elves, who are intent on climbing your walls and delivering gifts to your chimney. The swine!

Press left and right to move the building left and right, and swing the gnome into those Christmassy bastards, knocking them thusly yonder and thither.

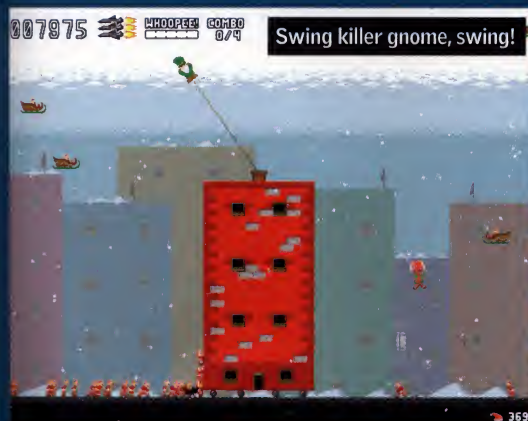
You use the space bar to deftly grab bricks from the building (actually, this means you're playing as the gnome, not the building as I had previously written), and drop the bricks on the skulls of the elven legions. Villainous Santa Clauses fly in from above and attempt to land on your roof – take these guys out and they'll crash into their allies below, racking up big combos and what can only be described as 'mega-points'. Fail

to swat them from the skies and they'll detach the precious lifeline connecting you to the building, spelling your demise.

There's even a cat who, if he makes it to your chimney without you knocking him off (difficult, as cat and elf alike are flung from your walls with screaming abandon), will grant you wishes (as long as you wish for more bricks, and sometimes golden bricks).

*Garden Gnome Carnage* is random fun, proper hatstand, all colourful and rife with twee merriment. You might not have much control over the madly swinging garden ornament, but it's stupid fun all the same.

And as a special treat something really wonderful happens when you reach 80,000 points. But you won't get us to tell you what the wonder is, you'll just have to play this game right now to rock your life with this monumental achievement.



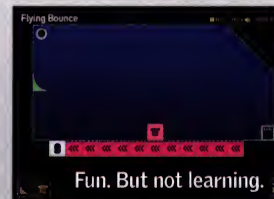
Swing killer gnome, swing!



Death to the Santas!

## WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

### LAUNCHBALL



Fun. But not learning.

[www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/launchpad/launchball](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/launchpad/launchball)

**IF YOU'VE NEVER** been to the Science Museum in London, I recommend it. They've got ferrous liquids there, for God's sake. You take a magnet to that stuff and some funky things will start happening, let me assure you.

*Launchball* is a game somehow associated with science, and more associated with energy conversion. The goal is to get a ball from one point to another, using magnets, fans and conveyor belts – most of which need to be powered in some way. Power can come from batteries, melting ice over water turbines, fire next to water below a steam engine, a windmill in front of a fan, all sorts of places in fact. Just drag and drop objects into the level and press play to test out your arrangement. Don't worry, you won't learn anything.



# FREEPLAYPLAY!



Follow him, or you'll end up lost.



At least he's having less fun than you.

## PARANOIA

They really are trying to kill you

[paranoia.level-design.ru](http://paranoia.level-design.ru) | Mod for: *Half-Life*



**THE RUSSIANS DEVELOPERS** behind *Paranoia* certainly know how to get you feeling like the world's stacked against you. A grinding set of sound effects. A set of training run-to missions which give you a chance to read some notes, and overhear some conversations, all giving you an insight into the characters around you. There's even a guy playing a guitar, like *STALKER*'s random rifle-wielding musicians, only that guy wasn't playing a Russian version of Status

Quo's *In The Army Now*. I suppose I should be thankful he wasn't singing *Margherita Time*.

It's all part of the tension building – and it works, a bit. Once you've picked up medkits, a visor, gas mask and had a thoroughly needless bangabout on a shooting range, you're sent on your first mission. Even then, it's a while before you're shooting bullets into a man; there's deserted areas to explore, and squad members to follow around before you end up alone and being shot at.

You only realise how good the tension was when the combat starts. The heavy recoil on the rifle, coupled with the drop in frame rates when there's much action on screen led to me using the pistol with the visor, and relying on headshots and painkillers.

The great *Half-Life* AI is recognisably there, but this is a game to play for exploring the world and story they've created for you, rather than the incredible set-pieces of *Half-Life 2*.

A final warning for any playing through Steam: make sure you install to



the same directory as your *Half-Life* installation; as the default installation values for the mod are wrong. On top of this, getting the game to eventually work involved me having to remove Vista's User Account Control to give me full administrator access.

If I was in any way paranoid, I'd have given in before I got started.



Jigging around a body part. An old Russian tradition.



Comedy overreactions to a fart #6.



# CANADIAN FORCES: DIRECT ACTION

It's not like being a police officer...

[www.armylearning.ca/cfda](http://www.armylearning.ca/cfda) | Mod for: SWAT 4



**IF YOU THINK** of gaming as training for life – and if you do, then your life is one we'd very much like to live – then you might be interested in *Canadian Forces: Direct Action*. Although the very idea of a Canadian Army seems at odds with the cheerful, comedic and charming French moosiness of the country, this conversion is fully backed by the Canadian National Defence. Just playing it gives you the same training that soldiers and police get. As a bonus, you don't get a thick-necked sergeant bellowing into your face to stop eating Mars bars while you train.

SWAT 4 was developed by Irrational, who went on to become 2K Boston and make a little game called *BioShock*. The emphasis was always on realism; with non-lethal tactics preferred, and strict rules of engagement. This mod takes that theme to its logical conclusion, and adds a

Play: **MOD**



large number of maps, ranging from the movie cliché classic 'sea container village', to more realistic environments, such as an Iraqi village.



Is this *Life on Mars*?



Is there a moose loose about this hoose?

# PROJECT REALITY



Things just got more real

[www.realitymod.com](http://www.realitymod.com) | Mod For: *Battlefield 2*

**SURE, WE'VE MENTIONED** it before, but a new release of this excellent *Battlefield 2* mod is well worth anyone's time. It's part of the realistic genre that had to be redefined as ultra-realistic when people saw the nonsense that passes for regular realism. *Project Reality* has always worn its inaccessibility with pride, and continues to do so – the new version features refinements to the squad

Play: **MOD**



dynamic, and the introduction of a counter-attack game mode, which is a slight refinement of traditional point-capturing gameplay.

Again, we've mentioned it before – but again, it's well worth repeating. This is a great mod for anyone who thinks *TF2* is "a bit colourful".



Call that nodding dog who sounded like Vic Reeves at some point.

# FOJ COMMUNITY MOD

They said she couldn't be modded

[www.flatoutjoint.com](http://www.flatoutjoint.com) | Mod for: *Flat Out 2*

**THE MAKERS OF** the *FOJ* Community mod are as proud of the fact their mod exists as they are the content contained in it. *Flat Out 2* isn't a game that was made with modders in mind. The people involved in this project have had to get their hands dirty with code.

The mod currently comes in four parts, and downloading all four parts will amount to well over a gigabyte of

Play: **MOD**



bandwidth; but for your patience, you'll get 90 new cars, a bunch of new tracks, meddlesome tinkering with the existing tracks, and gameplay tweaks to extend the shelf life of this moderately excellent racer.



I've got a bottle of Cava in my backpack. Let's get pissed.



# PC ZONE JACKASS

CYBER BULLYING



## Can you make an oblivious *Oblivion* NPC cry?

**BEFORE NOW WE'VE** courted a husband and ended up killing him because it was the only way of getting him to lie down for pretend sex. Later we'd pile crap on some lady's bed to see what she'd do – fruit, bowls, an hourglass, nothing was beyond reason. By now Tamriel's population are terrified by our presence, like taunted budgies shuffling to the far end of their cage, avoiding eye contact, twittering nervously. Today we justify their fears by torturing one of them.



## DOGGED DETERMINATION

**THE PREMISE:** The quickest way to earn a man's heart is punching his dog. The second quickest way is to constantly remind him that his dog is dead, and that no amount of following you around the room will bring it back to life.

**THE SETUP:** Find Rufrius Vinicius in Anvil's Fighters Guild (you'll need to join, otherwise people will get huffy about you traipsing about the place). Locate his dog, Mojo. Punch it until it's dead, and make sure he sees you do it. Otherwise it's not proper bullying.

**THE RESULT:** It takes a couple of punches to send a dead Mojo pirouetting across the room. Rufrius seems annoyed: not enough to hit me, but just enough to follow me around the room demanding an explanation. He does this until I'm arrested and sent to prison. Only mildly perturbed, I return that night to wreak superfluous mayhem. Fighting with *Oblivion*'s physics system, I wrestle dead Mojo on to Rufrius's breakfast table before stealing away into Anvil's inky night. Rufrius didn't see me do it, but he'll know it was me.



## CLOTHES CONUNDRUM

**THE PREMISE:** People love their clothes, and when they're naked they get all embarrassed. The fear of suddenly entering a stark state of undress while in public has no doubt formed naturally in the near-sentient minds of *Oblivion*'s NPCs, a fact that we are going to cruelly exploit.

**THE SETUP:** Find Rufrius Vinicius in Anvil's Fighters Guild. He's so into fighting that he lives and sleeps in the Fighters Guild, so the best we

can do is remove his clothes while he's talking to his friends. Bring up the console, click on him, and type 'removeallitems' to nuditify him.

**THE RESULT:** Sadly, the victim's clothes don't get whipped off as if some mischievous wind machine has blasted them away. Nor do they simply fall off as their owner desperately grabs at them and gets all in an embarrassed panic trying to cover their genitalia. In fact, NPCs don't seem to care that you've just conjured away their attire. We magicked Rufrius's clothes right the way off, and we're not sure he even noticed it happening. Won't he feel silly when he gets to the end of his day, only to realise he's been mostly naked for god knows how long? It's not an immediate payoff, but if you're patient and don't mind seeing your antics go unregistered by the game's AI, this one's a winner.

"Hello Mojo. Sit there like a good soon-to-be corpse."

"Lie down. Now stay. Good dead dog."





## THE EMBIGGENING

**THE PREMISE:** Inspired by the movie *Big*, we decide to freak Rufrius out by making him a giant. That's not really what happened in *Big*, but to be honest we're struggling to find a reference that's not *Honey, I Blew Up The Baby*.

**THE SETUP:** Find Rufrius Vinicius in Anvil's Fighters Guild. Bring up the console, click on Rufrius, and type 'setscale 5'. He is now massive.

**THE RESULT:** Annoyingly, as with anything else you do to an NPC that isn't hitting them or talking to them about mudcrabs, Rufrius is oblivious to the alteration. He's a looming 12ft tall, too tall to fit through doorways or live a normal life. But as if to defy us, he does just that. Doorways are walked through, ignoring the various physical properties of walls that prevent upper bodies passing through them. Beds are slept in. Conversations are had. Rufrius is ignoring us, pretending that he isn't actually huge and naked, and that his dog isn't dead and festering on top of his breakfast upstairs.

Of course, as anybody knows, ignoring bullies is absolutely the wrong thing to do: we kill Rufrius, and laugh as his gigantic nude body sprawls itself wall-to-wall across the Fighters Guild lobby. Remember kids, acknowledge and cower before bullies or you'll drive them to do terrible things.



**SEND US YOURS!**  
So it's not possible to bully NPCs in *Oblivion*, because their single-minded AI routines aren't capable of dealing with anything unusual. If you can bully a virtual character in a virtual game, then take a screenshot, tell us what you did and email us at [letters@pczone.co.uk](mailto:letters@pczone.co.uk). We'll feature the best on our blog. And we don't condone real-life bullying. Remember: It's only funny if the victim doesn't exist.







# Online Zone

[www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk)


Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just hit [www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk) now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, Fight Club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!



## NOTES FROM THE FORUM

### Whatever happened to branching dialogue trees?

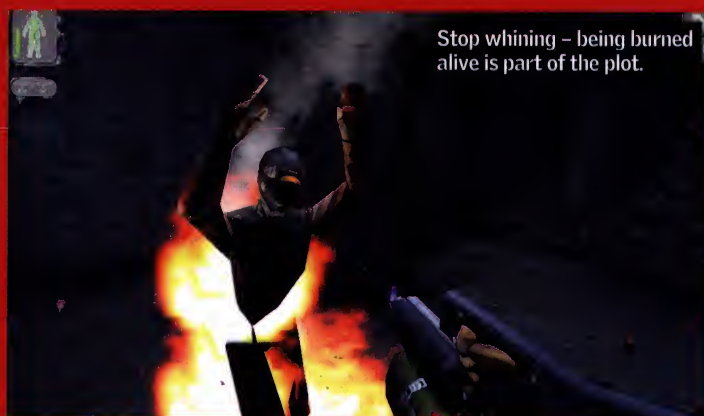
I used to read some books and I used to like it, reading stories is great, and the medium of computer game is tailor-made for a marriage with epic story, I mean what do you want to keep you interested when the gameplay is repetitive? - loads of story. I want a narrator talking story to me in the middle of gunfights, on the quiet bits, when I access the menus, everything.

Jonny\_p66

*Jericho* has a good story, odd ending but it was good, if it's story-driven gaming you want you can't beat *Call of Juarez*, that game had me playing till all hours, phenomenal storyline.

Mad\_AI

Personally I don't think PC games can go further in storytelling, they'll never be as good as novels I reckon. I mean you have some neat little twists and turns à la *KOTOR*, but I think the overall concept of a game cannot be fully married with a great story, you need action-packed pacing etc and games just can't deliver that story development.



Games do well at what they do now with stories such as *Neverwinter Nights*, but they'll never be games that match something as brilliant as an Orwell novel.

Shakermaker07

It continues to amaze me how few new games do story really well, and more specifically do story within a game world really well. You know, games where you not only feel engaged and immersed but also feel like you are having an effect on events or the

environment. Great narratives provide great, dramatic situations for gameplay. It stuns me that more developers don't understand this simple fact.

Dogen\_D\_Derrible

That's why seven years on *Deus Ex* is hailed as the greatest game ever made, the world and setting are just immense. It's one of the few games in which the story hooks you and actually shocks you.

Shakermaker07

## ON THE BLOG

What's been happening on *ZONE's* web diary this month...

**NO-ONE COULD** have been more surprised than us when the fifth pubcast went up on time. That's simply not like us, and can only be blamed a form of seasonal disorder. Rest assured, it won't happen again, and you won't hear a peep out of us for another six months.

Causing much eye-rolling mock excitement was the *Duke Nukem Forever* video, which was... well, it was cool and everything, but... come on. Isn't this all some incredible post-modern meta-joke now?

The Activision Blizzard logo competition was won by the excellent Blobb, whose logo depicted the hybrid Blactivision monolith as a punching monster that picks on publishers and developers who wear glasses. For shame, AB!

Meanwhile, the Tat Zone thread produced some of the stingiest bidding yet, with a completely undesirable cap selling for the price of £1. Do you bunch of tight-fisted monsters enjoy taking the money off those poor kiddies? For shame!

**PCZONE PUBCAST!**  
Round 4 now available on the *ZONE* website and iTunes!

## POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

# WIN!

Send us your MMO character screenshots to win stuff...

You already know all about our 'PC ZONE Around The World' bit in Letters, where we ask you to send in your photos of yourself holding your favourite mag all over the globe. Well now, you're cordially invited to send us screenshots of you or your guild in your favourite MMO with a brief, jolly explanation of what you're up to. The best two postcards sent to us every month at [letters@pczone.co.uk](mailto:letters@pczone.co.uk) will be printed here and win a PC game. Get snapping...



## FIGHT CLUB



One day, we'll get around to *COD4*

**FIRST OFF,** A big hello to Red's sniper, Tanuki. The guy or girl who switched to a melee weapon, causing the sportsman-like Escaped Monkey (Steve Hogarty) to do the same. The dance is on, thought Steve, so let's dance this dance. At which point, Tanuki switched back to his machine gun, and mowed poor Steve down. It outraged Steve so much that he swapped teams, changed to a Pyro, and dedicated an entire round to obscuring Tanuki's dirty sniper vision with flames.

Steve then found himself trapped on Red by *TF2*'s team balancing rules, and formed an alliance with Fight Club regular Vonstilton, a pair who quickly became dubbed the "Cheese Monkey". Meanwhile, on Will's server, medic Quite\_Rob healed Will (like a crawly swot), before making a jesting offer of man love. Which was jestingly accepted, before everybody stopped knowing who was and wasn't joking. They're going for their first date next week.



At this point the Blues lost. Again.

Log limited his adventures to getting busted for shittiness, when the whole server was informed of him getting a really basic achievement, only six months late.

Join in the Fight Club and other announcements by joining the Zone Steam Community Group at [steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz](http://steamcommunity.com/groups/pcz)

"Fire? Where?"



## ZONE CHAT

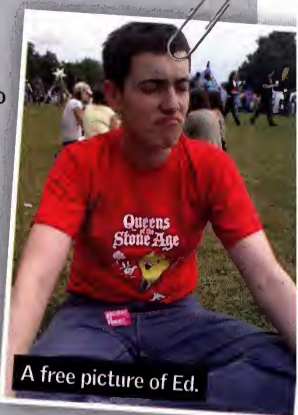


So many dogs, all up in our grills

**BECAUSE IT WAS** the time of the month, we logged onto Zone Chat, only to be mobbed by our fans questioning about the team, begging Ed for pictures - which he refuses to hand out for free.

We also forgot to do a competition (so a double-one next time!) because we were so into talking about how wonderful it would be to work at Valve, and how we're all moderately interested but maybe not excited about seeing how *Assassin's Creed* turns out on the PC.

This was easily the most pointed and structured Zone Chat in history, mostly because we talked about games. Hooray!



A free picture of Ed.

### How to join in!

To be a part of next month's Zone Chat, join our Steam Community group: PC Zone (PCZ). Keep an eye out for announcements at the [www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk) forums for the date of the next chat event...



### Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club - perhaps you're too busy fighting fires in East London armed with a special hose - then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows - some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at [www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk).

### WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ\_NorthernScum  
Will Porter PCZ\_Batsphinx  
Steve Hogarty PCZ\_escaped\_monkey  
Phil Wand PCZ\_People's Front Of Judea  
Jon Blyth PCZ\_Log  
Ed Zitron PCZ\_Edz

- COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**  
[cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015](http://cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015)  
[cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025](http://cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025)
- HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH**  
[hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065](http://hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065)
- DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**  
[dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085](http://dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085)
- TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**  
[tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045](http://tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045)
- ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS**  
[pczone2.jolt.co.uk](http://pczone2.jolt.co.uk)
- PREY**  
[prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719](http://prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719)
- BATTLEFIELD 2142**  
[bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567](http://bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567)
- TEAM FORTRESS 2**  
[pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115](http://pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115)  
[pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125](http://pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125)  
[pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135](http://pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27135)

Holiday greetings!

They make a sweet couple.

NAGA PLEASE!

"Naga please!" is the chatback delivered by sassy Tauren Shaman Scarwig. And it's a solid pun - even if half of us failed to understand it - so stop frowning. We're not hurting anyone, so it's just about okay.

Scarwig  
(Chris Grazioso)

Wish You Were Here!

Bragging: a perk of the job.

Steve and Log dress up in their Christmas presents - Murloc outfits - and run around saying "we're games journalists". Because that's precisely what they won't expect us to do. But it stopped being fun when people chased them.

Boviss and Somota  
(Log and Steve)







*Let Thy light and blessed influence  
be shed upon this afflicted land.  
Pity the evils which we suffer under  
the power and tyranny of war.  
Help us to see that suffering delivers justice.  
Harken to our prayers and provide  
a remedy for our calamities.*

*Say a Prayer*  
**CRYSIS**<sup>®</sup>  
*is upon us*

Out now



HELP SAVE THE WORLD AT  
[ELECTRONICARTS.CO.UK/CRYSIS](http://ELECTRONICARTS.CO.UK/CRYSIS)

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# Retro ZONE

## MAGIC CARPET 2

You may not believe it, but this really is hi-tech gaming

FLASHBACK  
OF THE  
MONTH

### BUT HOW?

*Magic Carpet 2* is from a long line of successful Bullfrog titles, all of which were so popular that they're still available today. *Theme Hospital* is currently going for £7, and *Theme Park World* is selling for £3 on play.com.

The *Magic Carpets* aren't on general release, but the 88MB file that is *Magic Carpet 2* is available from that emporium of borderline morality, The Home Of The Underdogs. Don't worry about the file name being *Netherw*, because the game's subtitle was *The Netherworlds*.

Have a look, and convince yourself you're a good person by shouting "If I like it, I'll buy it!"

### Links...

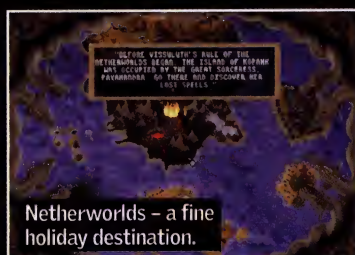
1 the-underdogs.info  
A useful resource for downloading things.

2 google.com  
Somewhere to type in *Magic Carpet 2* HOTU.

**T**HINGS DON'T APPEAR out of nowhere, and for no particular reason on the PC. We expect rationale, reasons, and if we see a monster spawn without a particle-riddled materialisation effect and three minutes of expository dialogue about "some weird shit going on around here", we consider it an immersion-breaking crime. And it's all reality's fault: Bob Hoskins never ate a mushroom in the *Super Mario Bros.* film because it would have been ugly and strange as a real thing. Plus, the suddenly-implicit drugs references would have caused as much outrage in the conservative right as if Tinky Winky popped a purple goatse and invited everyone in.

*Magic Carpet 2* is certainly no Mario. It's first-person action halfway between *Doom*'s scalable sprites and *Descent*'s uppy-downy motion sickness. It was groundbreaking in its real-time deformation of the landscape, and it was still early enough to cover up some of the limitations of '90s hardware with the explanation that it's "magic". So we do get bonuses and monsters simply appearing, and it still feels right. And of course they're badly animated: they're magic bees.

Playing *Magic Carpet 2* again isn't your full-on nostalgia, because it's part of the start of 'real' gaming that has resulted in people aiming for the



nuts instead of the head, just to see the death animation.

The *Magic Carpet* series is top-drawer stuff, with constant progression (there are loads of spells, most upgradeable) and a multiplayer so combative and strategic that even thinking about going back there

gives us palpitations. *Magic Carpet* is a lovely balance of early '90s realism with the utter lack of realism of the... erm... early '90s. Things always have to happen for a reason, but only games can make us accept the dumb, crazy reasons. Also: love. But I reckon that's for girls.

## MAGIC CARPET RULES

And everything since '96 is shit

**AUTO-AIM**  
Who enjoys aiming? No one. *Magic Carpet* is adorably forgiving in this way, making aiming idiot easy.

**SPELLS**  
It's a shooter, but it's strategic, and you get dozens of spells. Boom-banga-bang indeed.

**GOATSHOOTER**  
Technically you're good, but you still have to shoot goats to suck up their mana. Bleating cruel that.

**CASTLES**  
Five levels of castle means even the most aspirational Harry Potter-wannabe wizard will be happy.

**LOADING SCREEN**  
It's a loading screen of a man holding a CD - because CDs are cutting edge technology, so they are.

**MULTIPLAYER**  
Once you face up to enemy wizards, you realise how stressful the game can be. 3... 2... 1... and... panic!



# NOW & THEN

[Insert preferred clichéd *Ghostbusters* reference here]

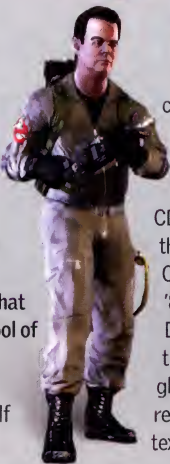
NOW



GHOSTBUSTERS

IT'S LIKE 23 years haven't even passed. With just the frothiest word of a new *Ghostbusters* game, the shelves in WHSmiths are heavy with that iconic logo. Even we succumbed to a little one last month, but seriously, what option was there? A picture of Spengler winking? Zeddmore looking a bit tokenistic? Did you expect anyone not to use that beautiful bygone (1984's bygone, right?) symbol of all that is right with Hollywood?

The new game might have Bill Murray on board, incredible graphics, and be touting itself as "a real sequel" to the movies, but to this



THEN



GHOSTBUSTERS

curmudgeonly page, that all smacks of saying "it's like a film, but with you as the star!"

And when anyone says that, you've got to assume they're stuck in the multimedia CD-ROM revolution, and have forgotten about the many dozens of interactive movies and CD-i games that were relentlessly shit. The '84 *Ghostbusters*: that was a thing to behold. Driving around the streets like in *GTA* (before that series regrettably went 3D), sucking up ghosts in a vacuum cleaner, it was a more realistic experience than any of these 5.1GB of textures that pass for gameplay today.

## PLAY IT!

You can play the original *Ghostbusters* on a range of 8-bit emulators, or you can play the remake which features another car.

- 1 Install the VICE C64 emulator. You can play it on an emulated Spectrum, but the game won't say "Ghostbusters!" when you hit the space bar on the title screen.
- 2 Download the *Ghostbusters* tape file, then pretend it is a cassette by telling VICE that's what it is. VICE will humour you by treating the file just like a Datasette, and loading it.
- 3 Play until bored, at which point download the remake at [snipurl.com/busters](http://snipurl.com/busters)
- 4 They play that game until bored, at which point you are possibly ready for the new game.



## MAME FRAME MY BEAUTIFUL BALLOONS

LAST MONTH WE cast a darting eye over video game bees – this month, our cursory analytical funtube is being swung around the thrilling subject of balloons. They can be friendly, like when you're flying around Auckland in *The New Zealand Story*. And they can be evil – like the wolves who see fit to use balloons as a primary tool to kidnap your children in *Pooyan*. One thing's for sure: balloons are a great and fragile way to fly, and they're never too far away from a bow and arrow.

The first balloon games were so innovative and groundbreaking that they all had "Balloon" in the title, as a proud badge of their new technology. This has

the excellent side-effect of making them much easier to search for in databases of MAME ROMs. As such, we now know that *Crazy Balloon* was 1980's predecessor to the GBA's baton-twirling *Kuru Kuru Kururin*, whereas *Balloon Bomber* went for the evil approach, with bombs attached to balloons that are dropped by a jet airplane. As far as tactics go, it's up there with tying a stick of dynamite to a mouse's tail – and yet, through sheer perseverance and infinite resources, those sodding balloon bombers would always win.

Balloons. The essence of fun, and a word that loses all sense when you overuse it. Balloons. Baalloons. Bloonz.



NEW ZEALAND STORY

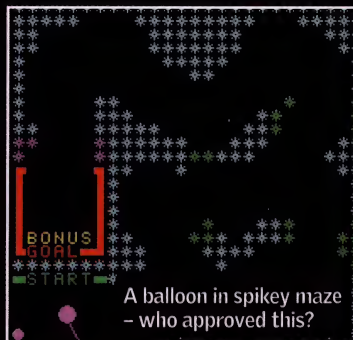
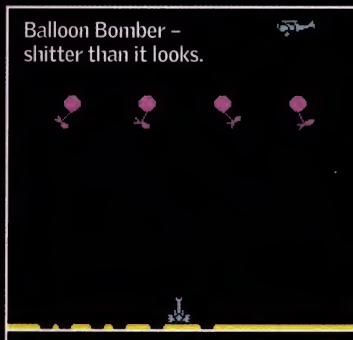


Pooyan – gaming paedophilic allegory.

## WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator*, currently emulating over 3,500 games. You can download it from [www.mame.net](http://www.mame.net) – use *Mame32* for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.

Balloon Bomber – slither than it looks.



A balloon in spikey maze – who approved this?

## BACK IN THE DAY...



## MEMORIES OF PACHYDERMS

By Jon Blyth

I used to have a jumper that had a pink elephant on it. My parents tell me that I couldn't remember this jumper, because I grew out of it when I was two. But I remember that pink elephant. He squeaked when I pressed him, which I took to mean he was having a lovely time pressed against my nip-nips. Then he disappeared, to be replaced by a procession of pachyderm-free jumpers which I quietly hated. The lights and colours drained from my life, and my memories faded. Three years later, they bought home a Videopac G7000. And that, - sadly enough, is where my memories begin again.



## SUPERTEST

# THE SHOOTER OF 2007



We love guns. We love trying to embarrass Log. This one is magical...

### YOUR VIEW

Last month, we asked you what treats you were waiting for in 2008. Here are your dreams...

#### APOCALYPTIC FUN

There is *Fallout 3*. There are other games, but they aren't *Fallout 3*.

Jonny\_p66

#### I WANNA CRY AGAIN

I'm quite interested in *Far Cry 2*. I didn't originally care (what with it not being created by Crytek), but the previews that I have seen look promising. It may still turn out to be average but it will be interesting to see how it turns out...

beats12

#### MO' NEWER GUNS

I want *Call of Duty 5: Even More Modern Warfare*. After the way they've handled their new direction and seemingly out of nowhere made the best FPS of 2007 this is an absolute must. Maybe *Call of Duty 5: Medieval Warfare*? You know you want that!

Liquid\_metal

#### FUN WITH NUKES!

I'm daring to be moderately optimistic about *Fallout 3*. My reasoning is that they've basically got the engine already, having made *Oblivion* with it, so they'll have more time to focus on actual content.

-Doomus-

#### LUV U DUKEY!

OMG DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Jonny\_p66 (again)

**L**ATE INTO FEBRUARY it might be when you read this, but this Supertest was recorded the day after the Future Christmas party.

As such, it's roughly half about which shooter has added most to the genre in 2007, and half about the fact that Log thinks he pissed the bed in the Bristol Holiday Inn.

Was it *STALKER*, which came out of a long development period to become a moderately brilliant freeform adventure? Why did Log wake up wrapped up like a sausage roll in his duvet, and unable to move? Perhaps it was *BioShock*, whose incredible immersion and design makes it one of the year's best games, despite the growing backlash and counter-backlash? And if he really did piss himself, why was it the back of his trousers that were wet?

### PUB IN YOUR ITUNES

This is one of the most hungover Supertests yet, with Log sat quietly on the floor, and Steve and Ed taking the lead because they didn't make it to the party. They actually come up with some good points, which goes helps to making this Supertest something other than a story about a fully - in fact, over - grown man thinking he wee-weed on his pillow.



The Supertests now join the Pubcasts on our incredible RSS feed, so be sure to subscribe - the links are on the DVD right next to the Supertest, and in the meantime go to [www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk) and look up the sticky thread at the top of the

Zone Forums. That's how you get your words in that column on the left, which is the first stepping stone in the wide river which is becoming as famous and adored as the Beckhams (well, Beckham) and Tina Turner combined. **PCZ**



If you don't understand this picture, welcome back from holidaying on Io.



# STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill gets syrupy in *Maple Story*...

**2008: WHAT THE** fuck's going on? I'm sat in an undecorated room, chilled to the bone, listening to music that would offend an elevator, while mindlessly stabbing a giant snail with a sword. When I first struck a keyboard in anger for this magazine over a decade ago, this wasn't how I saw it panning out. I am, in a very real sense, wasting my life.

It would appear that I am not the only one, as an argument has broken out that is banal even by online role-playing game standards. I only catch the last knockings of it, but it appears that someone called Bellatrixa has had a pop at Sugarsweet69, claiming that she "would know ALL about sucking." UltimateSin has then leapt to the besmirched party's defence, imploring Bellatrixa to "leave Sugar alone u fugly slut," cleverly insulting her while bypassing the expletive filter, which is apparently happy with the word "slut." Someone called Critius has then got involved, and is informed by UltimateSin that, "I've had more sex than u nerd."

All lovely stuff, despite the fact that I've yet to get past the training area of the ostensibly shiny happy side-scrolling world of *Maple Story*.

## THREE'S COMPANY

On taking my first tentative steps into the brightly coloured 2D universe, my initial reaction is that it's either a joke, or that

the world has finally run out of dungeons to trawl and elves to smite. Editor Will (!) is adamant that it'll be a laugh though, and even promises that him and some of the office-bound drones will join me in my caper. Perhaps that is to be Porter's legacy: that he got more staff involved in NeverQuest.

In preparation for this momentous event, I hit the New Year gone hard, intent on having a character worthy of running with *PC ZONE*'s finest. Like the lengthy training montage in *Rocky IV* – with wildly different but equally execrable music – I work my body like a gladiator, running up mountains, slaughtering snails and collecting dancing mushrooms. A Frenchie even sells me a green headband, a suitably Rambo-esque symbol of my newfound status. For so long the runt of the litter, I will finally be a warrior to contend with, the equal of my brethren.

In the event, it turns out that none of them have ever played it before. Painfully backtracking to the beginning to guide them by the hand, Log is the first to appear, a feral axe-wielding ginger, followed by the sheepish Will who promptly gets himself stuck up a rope.

## MOLLUSC MASSACRE

Their ineptitude is frankly pitiful, and it's embarrassing to be seen with them. So much so that I leave them to find their own way while I set off on such vitally

**I stare into the distance and intone, "I have killed a thousand snails..."**

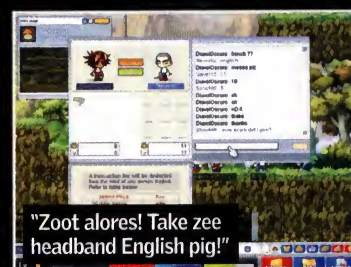


important quests as delivering a letter. My minions are having a somewhat less satisfying experience. As Log points out, "I have no idea where to go or how to enjoy myself here."

Checking my stats, he respectfully notes, "Level six, I see. You've been at it." Indeed I have, and with all the gravitas of a world-weary hero, I stare into the middle distance and intone, "I must have killed a thousand snails..."

I've been getting through them like the French, although Log is having less joy, complaining, "These snails are surprisingly tough." I'm about to suggest that he chucks in a bit of garlic butter and slings 'em down his neck when he has the temerity to ask me for some money.

"I need 131 Mesos for a Razor," implores the lowly Ginger. "Go on, spare us 131 Mesos." Unfortunately his chin-glove



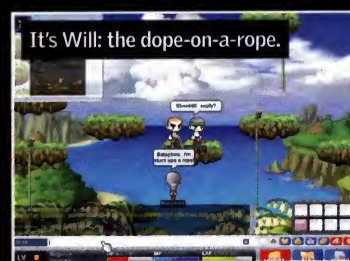
has to remain intact, as I don't spare him so much as the sweat off my headband.

## CASH BACK

Meanwhile, the hapless Will is missing in action, last seen stuck up a rope. A scout of the area yields nothing, although he can be heard wailing, "there are mushrooms," which doesn't particularly narrow it down. Log eventually finds him and it appears that Will has been bitten by the seadog, with a yearning for the ocean and the treasures beyond. Bidding a final farewell to Maple Island, we board the ship to set sail for distant lands. Except Will hasn't got any money.

"Ask Steve," suggests Log. "He's made a mint from snail blood." Indeed I have, and I donate the requisite 150 Mesos to Porter in order to keep the gang together. Gleefully accepting my charity, Will announces, "I'm rich! Screw you guys, I'm off to spend Steve's money on liquor and cheap women."

No sooner have we hit dry land than he sods off, saying he has to do "editor stuff." Log has buggered off, and in desperation I book a solo trip to the Mushroom Shrine Of Japan. The sage Hikari announces, "This is where you leave your pain and fatigue behind." If only... **PCZ**





## DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

# CRYSIS

*Will Porter* turns on stealth mode and creeps into Crytek HQ

**SEEING AS THEY'RE** so adept at (justified) high-end technological willy-waving, it's interesting to discover that in person the gents who make up Crytek are some of the most polite, interesting and decent human beings in the entirety of the games industry.

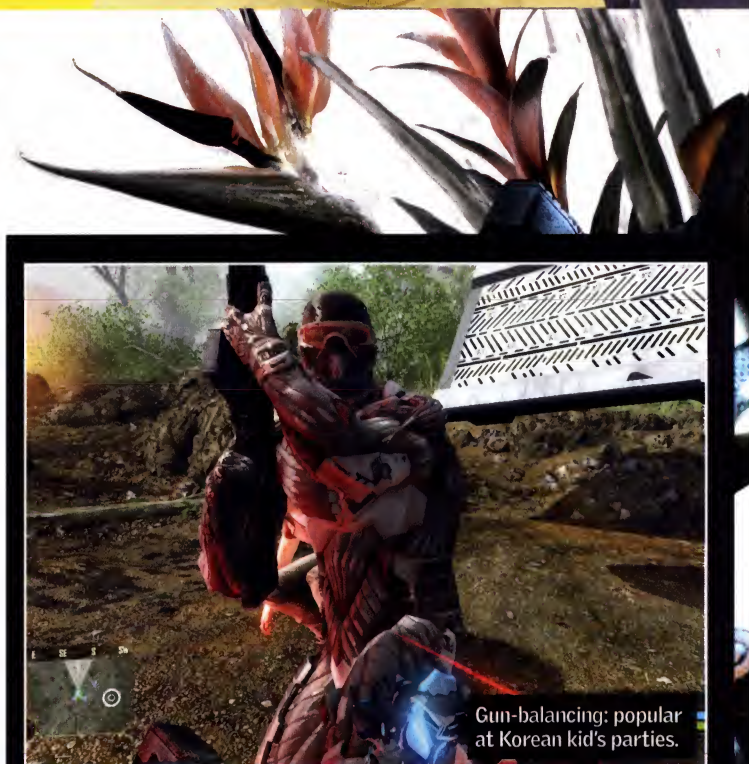
Always honest and philosophical about their achievements, our interview with them on the creation of the gameplay marvel that was *Crysis* was so open and so interesting that we've granted it extra room. The men interviewed were senior game designer Bernd Diemer (left) and lead level designer Sten Hubler (right) – let's just hope our mag is of a high enough spec to do them justice...



**01 SUITED AND BOOTED:** Bernd: "The original design for the nanosuit was actually something different, back when we had our working title 'Paradise'. We had an upgrade system that started you as a normal soldier in his uniform, and as you went through the first half of the game you got upgrades to the suit, to fight the aliens with. We tried to incorporate that into the design, but we found that it didn't work out too well because it was more of a role-playing thing. After preproduction though, we decided to give all the stuff to the player right from the start, and that's when we really started thinking about the nanosuit as essential – a core feature of the game."


**"We wanted somebody who could do cool stuff but never an outright superhero who could fly."**

Bernd Diemer, on what made the nanosuit such damn fun.



**02 MANO A NANO:** Bernd: "The inspiration was the 2020 Future Warrior project, which nearly every army on earth is working on. They're not looking to create superheroes, but to make people move faster and act stronger. From that we took it a bit towards the edge, more towards sci-fi. We wanted somebody who could do cool stuff but never an outright superhero who could fly or be far beyond human enemies. We wanted to give people more choice in encounters, and so we came up with this three power system, so you could go into a situation and think 'Hey, maybe I'll cloak here,' jump on top of something or whatever."





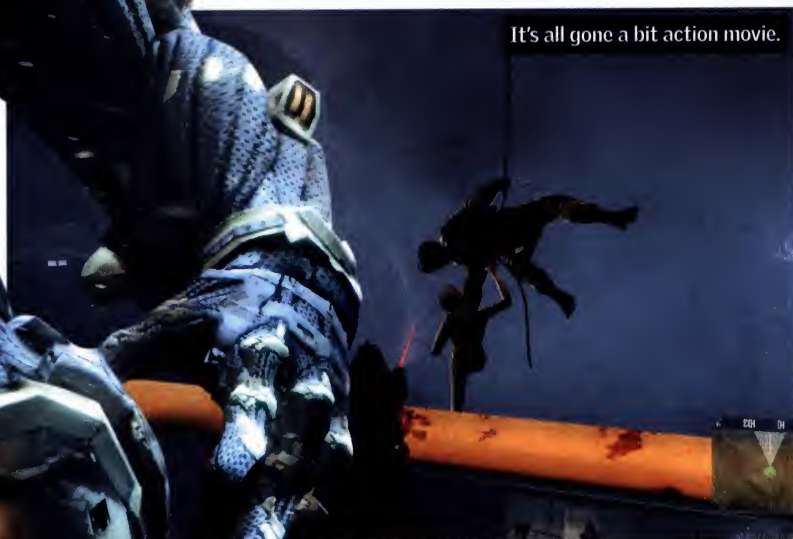
I call this one Bitey.



03

**NANO REJECTS:** Bernd: "We had this device, which allowed you to adjust the external temperature of the cloak to match the environment. We took that out because it was so complicated to work - fiddling with the dials. In the end we used a more digital system: you're either cloaked, or you're not. At one time, anything we thought was cool we'd try - even our version of bullet-time. We had a prototype but, even though it was really cool, it was just one of those things you just have to do right - if we have a superpower in the game it has to be something we're comfortable with. So we thought 'No, no. We'll stick with what we have, and put it in the drawer with all our other fancy ideas.' We may take one or two out in the future."

It's all gone a bit action movie.



04

**BEWARE BRANCH MONSTER** Bernd: "From the start we wanted to have this completely open world in which you have the freedom to even kill story characters, but then we got to the problem that every project like this has, that we can't tell the story if a story character is dead. It turns into something we nowadays call 'The Branch Monster,' because when you cut one thing, there'll be another head growing. The most important thing in the end was the production value, and the story itself, so we decided to focus on a more traditional storytelling method - you want to make people care about characters in the story, and having them killable is counterproductive to that. So now, if you were near the beginning with Psycho and he said 'Bollocks', and you accidentally dropped a grenade and killed him, you wouldn't be without him for the rest of the game. It's a lot better to have this character develop alongside the player than delivering an incredibly complex open-ended project."



**05 GRAB CHICKEN. THROW AT ROCK:** Bernd: "Little Animals. Always my favourite. People just take such a lot of pleasure in killing animals! Grabbing animals and throwing them around, or just throwing discarded ovens at North Koreans. Well, the grabbing character thing was one of the great moments we had in development, because when we started it – it was pretty stiff. We spoke about it, and thought that you should be able to grab every object in the game, but we didn't really think that people would want to grab enemies and throw them around. At the beginning we didn't even know this was possible. Later, we did a focus test, and one of the first things we noticed was that people would try and sneak up to the Koreans and grab them. But you couldn't! So we just thought 'Oh shit! Looks like we have to put that in as well.' We spoke to the programmers and everybody said 'No, we couldn't do that, it's impossible. It'll destroy the game.' But one of the programmers did it on his own and was able to present a prototype that was so well implemented that it proved it was doable. It still had a lot of problems, but we dealt with them. It's great that we got it through. No matter what it cost, we had to do it."



**07 SEXY WOMAN SUIT VS. GRUFF MAN SUIT:** Bernd: "The suit voice is something that you listen to a lot, and we wanted to give people the choice to hear it in a particular way, or just turn it off. One of our guys from the team (a vehicle programmer, actually) recorded a placeholder voice, and it was so popular with the team that they were kind of sad to think of it going when the sound team were about to do the real recording. He was always the favourite with the team. But it also became a labour of love from the sound department, and they went to do the voice recording with one of our female actors recording the commands. And they said 'Hey – we recorded it, can we just put it in? So people can switch? People will like that...'"



**06 KOREAN SPEAK:** Sten: "We always wanted the Koreans to only talk Korean, but in the focus tests some people didn't really understand the AI too well, or exactly what it was doing. So we made Delta difficulty mode for people who really want to get into the game, turning off elements that would suggest you weren't actually physically there. For the easier difficulty levels we just said 'OK we'll do it that way' and had them speak English. It was a compromise."



**08 NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH:** Sten: "With the cool stuff in that ship resting in the mountain, obviously we wanted to reveal things step-by-step in the levels leading up to it. Just suggesting at what might be to come. One of the ideas we had was to show the mountain falling apart. The problem with a shooter is that you can't control where the player looks so, as there, you have to design it so the player follows the level and sees what you want them to see."

**09 CRYTEK BEST BIT:** Bernd: "One of the things I got to play rather late in development is the fight in the graveyard against the Koreans in the nanosuits. When I played the mission, I was completely taken by surprise. Before, in earlier builds, they were all placeholder – they looked like the North Korean nanosuit guys but they couldn't do any special stuff. They couldn't jump or cloak or whatever – then I played it and the new behaviours were in! Suddenly these guys are cloaking and jumping onto the graves – it was really my favourite moment."





**"Suddenly these guys are cloaking and jumping onto the graves – it was really my favourite moment."**

*Crysis' graveyard battle holds a special place in Bernd Diemer's heart.*





10

**STUMBLING FOES:** Bernd: "The thing I personally like most is that Koreans occasionally fall down when jumping over fences. When I saw that the first time I was laughing out loud. It's something for me, from a design point of view, that gives a far greater sense of immersion and makes these people much more realistic. They try to do something perfectly, but mess it up like real humans do from time to time. These little extra things, for me, are what I'm most proud of. Away from the overall combat behaviour, which I hope people like as much as we do, we've added these little bits of behaviour. They flinch when you run at them in speed mode, if you cloak in front of them, they go 'Woah! Woah! Where did he go?'. It adds a lot to the feeling of being in a living world."



I'm afraid I'm going to have to move you on. With guns.

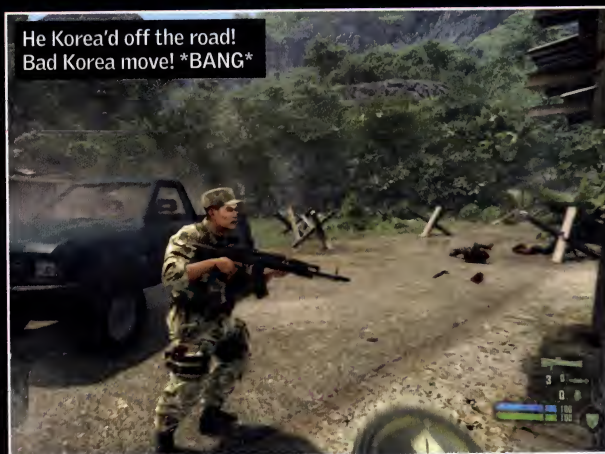
**"The issue with creating AI is you can't know ahead what all the possibilities are"**

Creating intelligent soldiers was Sten Hubler's biggest challenge.

11

**THE CHALLENGE OF GOOD AI:** Sten: "Our environment is very changeable, you can throw things around, you can block AI paths, cut down trees. Making the AI work in an environment that isn't fixed and steady is a major challenge, so this was far more than we had to deal with in *Far Cry*. For me, from a technology point of view what we did was a major achievement. It's not actually that visible, but if it doesn't work you see it clearly. The issue with creating AI, though, is that you can never fully account for what a player might be able to do; you can't know ahead what all the possibilities are. You have to make sure you have a system that can adapt. In a few areas there are some glitches where I would have hoped we could have dealt with, like the machine gun behaviour. There were just two or three things that didn't work out as we didn't have any more time."

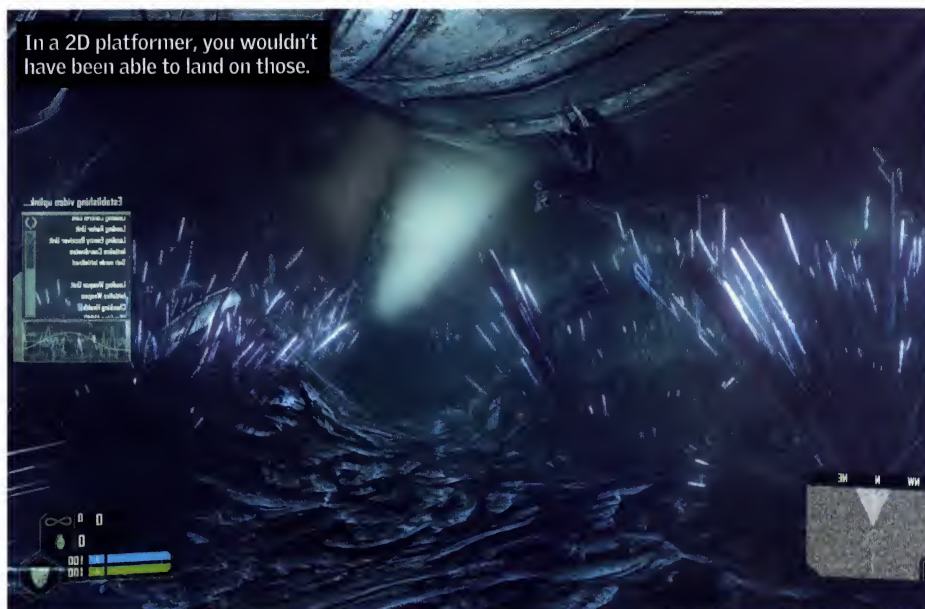
He Korea'd off the road!  
Bad Korea move! \*BANG\*





12

**CRYSTALLINE ENTITIES:** Bernd: "Creating the alien environment wasn't an easy process, it took us a long, long time to get right. We had to throw away a lot of things that didn't work out; we were initially designing environments before we knew what the AI was going to do. I think we constructed five times more alien rooms than you actually see in the game. It had to look good, and the zero-G level had to be a showcase – something that people haven't ever seen before, something where people are amazed by the graphics. It was important for us to hint to the player that this place was really big: that there was a lot more there than just what you see, that it's really a menacing hive, that you're completely alone in there and almost eager to get out of it. Not because it's boring, but because you feel out of your depth."



I think he likes me.



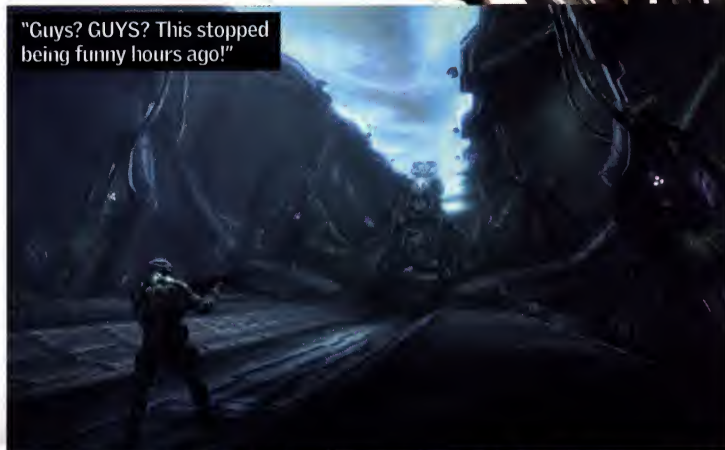
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**DEATH SQUIDS:** Stein: "We had thought about what the creatures in this environment could look like, and we put a lot of research into people who really like to think about this kind of thing scientifically. Several different designs popped up as to how they'd look, in the end falling onto octopus or squid-like creatures, with added claws. At one point we just had to take the cool concepts, put it all together and work out how they moved and how they attacked."

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**FROM ACTION BUBBLE TO ACTION CORRIDOR:** Bernd: "I think something that a lot of people noticed wasn't that the gameplay changes, but that it changes so abruptly. From one moment to the other we change the gameplay dramatically – in retrospect it would have been better to ease the player into it a bit more. So you didn't have that abrupt switch where you think 'Oh my God, what?' – most people at that point, they'd be pretty good with the nanosuit so they probably have their favourite way of taking out North Koreans – and something, in all honesty, that could have done with a bit more work is the switch between free-form North Korean combat and the level after the alien spaceship. I don't think the sections after that have bad gameplay, they drive the story forward, they are a lot more focused and through that we deliver a lot more production value and visual impact with all these gigantic aliens walking around. But I think people got a bit confused about what they were supposed to do after they came out of the spaceship, they were just so used to picking stuff up and throwing it at Koreans."

"Guys? GUYS? This stopped being funny hours ago!"





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**Question:** Who would play you in a movie of your life?

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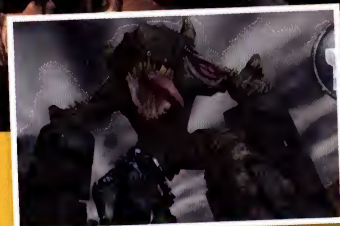
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# Are you Good or Evil?

Hi, I'm **Socucius Ergalla**. You might remember me from such Census and Excise Offices as the one at the beginning of Morrowind. The one where I asked you all those questions before suggesting you were a barbarian. I've developed a new questionnaire today, one that's designed to answer that thorniest of dilemmas - are you good, or evil? **So what are you? Are you good? Or are you evil? Let's find out!**

## You are in an underwater city holding a child in your hands. Do you:

**A)** Suck out her blood so you can shoot bees from your hand?

**B)** Let her go, assuming that a benevolent observer (like God, or some crazy German woman) will reward you?

**C)** Sit there, paralysed by the decision making process, wanting immediate reward but scared of an imaginary judge, spineless in your inability to take any course of action.

## You're a god of a local group of islands. What's your favourite spell?

**A)** Heal! What else will ensure a bumper harvest, and tend the animals?

**B)** That spell you found in a volcano that makes everyone's arseholes fall out and wasps fly into the hole.

**C)** You prefer a non-interventionist role, treating your universe like an unwatchably tedious soap opera.

## Someone you just met asks you to kill eight massive owls in exchange for a slightly better pair of shoes. Do you:

**A)** Do so, because they are disrupting the balance of nature, and upsetting the deer.

**B)** Do so, because killing owls is simply how you roll.

**C)** Spend many contented hours in the safe starting levels, failing to level up, declining duels and going up to other players and saying "hay whats up" and not listening to what they say back.

## A Russian ultra-nationalist is about to kill you having discovered you in a bush near Pripjat. Do you:

**A)** Become paralysed with liberal relativism and allow him to stab you.

**B)** Shoot his every joint and crouch for six minutes over his dying nose.

**C)** Argue gently that his actions might well be sincere, but they are misguided and destructive, and will never result in the outcome he desires. Then make out and have freaky Russian babies.

## A child asks you if you could retrieve his pet baby dragon from a barn. He says that the barn is haunted by the ghost of an angry farmer, and he is too scared. Do you:

**A)** Take the ghost through hours of self-grief counselling, eventually freeing his spirit. Then escort the baby dragon back to the child, before escorting them both to the cinema after he says they haven't seen *Spider-Man 3*.

**B)** Banish the ghost to the plains of suffering, mime a revolting but compelling sex act on the confused dragon, then give the child an awesome Chinese burn.

**C)** Have a look around the barn to see if there's any chests, before walking off to find a primary quest giver.

## You hold the cursed artifact of B'naouk, which can only be destroyed at the sacrificial dais before you. If you do not destroy it, the world will end in 15 minutes. Do you:

**A)** Destroy the cursed artefact, because it is the only sensible thing to do. Seriously, what else are you going to do - take it home and use it a disturbing mantlepiece ornament? It's a literal no-brainer.

**B)** Sell the artefact to some guy with red pupils in a cloak for 20 gold pieces, spend 10 on a whore, steal your money back, and spend all 20 on a better whore, timing your climax to coincide with the end of the world.

**C)** Just stand there for a while, listening to townsfolk telling you that they're too busy to talk to you and do your best to not get involved.

## How would you describe yourself?

**A)** A people person who would shoulder the curse of immortality if it meant you could cuddle more puppies.

**B)** Like that murderer guy from that film where he murders all those people and licks the juice off his fingers.

**C)** Some guy who's beginning to wonder why he's reading *PC ZONE*.



## So Are you Good or Evil?

**A** If you chose mostly A, then you should probably be a paladin or something. Congratulations! You're such a decent person that it doesn't even occur to you that a computer is incapable of judgment. You're such a twee git that even when consequence is removed from your actions, you behave like a big soppy goon because you're scared an NPC will shout at you.

**B** If you chose mostly B, then you might like being a rogue or some Satan thing. Well done! You're clearly in it for the lulz. Never mind that you're living out a perverse fantasy life and carrying out routine acts of extreme violence as the light of humanity flickers out in your pupils, because you're only playing a stupid game and since when did that matter?

**C** If you chose mostly C, you shouldn't be playing games. Your morality isn't recognised by this game. Please consider being more openly enthusiastic about the concepts of GOOD and EVIL, to the point where you're willing to put them in capital letters because they're THAT important.





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